

ITALIA!

Issue 129 August 2015 £4.40

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HOLIDAYS PROPERTY FOOD WINE CULTURE PEOPLE

MAGICAL MATERA

Explore the ancient city at the heart of Basilicata
in the undiscovered south of Italy

Gourmet Amalfi

Your guide to what and where
to eat on the cliffside coast

THE GARDENS OF THE MEDICI

Relax in the Giardini di Boboli in Florence

BUYING PROPERTY IN THE NORTH

Classic Italian recipes!



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MINUTES
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Welcome!



The city of Matera, once the capital of the southern – and relatively unexplored – region of Basilicata, is one of great history and intrigue. It boasts the best-preserved example of a troglodyte city; people have lived in caves dug out from the mountainside here since Paleolithic times. It is also a site of significant

religious importance, once containing well in excess of 100 churches. In this issue of *Italia!* we bring the wonders of Matera – soon to be the European City of Culture – to you. Join Sally FitzGerald as embarks on her journey, which starts on page 32.

From there we go to the Amalfi Coast, where Laura McLean indulges her love of great food and drink (page 42); we visit Florence and the Boboli Gardens, created for the Medici and described as the city's 'open museum' (page 55); and we survey Piedmont and the northwest, where our property expert Fleur Kinson explores your options if you're in the market for a home or city dwelling in this area (starting on page 20).

Of course, *Italia!* would not be the magazine you know and love without a selection of recipes to cook at home. We present a selection of classic Italian recipes this month, we also have five different risottos for you in our *Pronto!* section, and we use peaches – just coming into season – to make four very different drinks and dishes. Our recipe section starts on page 77.

Paul P.

Paul Pettengale Editor

PS Italia!'s brand new guide to Venice, the Veneto & Beyond is on sale now (£7.99). Visit www.italytravelandlife.com/italiaguides for details.

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Subscribe to *Italia!* and save money on the usual price* and get the magazine delivered directly to your door every month! Turn to page 30 for more information.

*UK orders only



48 Hours in Matera, page 32

AWARD WINNER!
The Italian Tourist Board voted *Italia!* the 'Best Overall Publication 2011'



THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



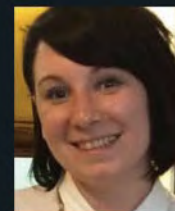
SALLY FITZGERALD is a vastly experienced travel journalist and editor of food and craft magazines. For this issue of *Italia!* she headed into the relatively unknown region of Basilicata

and to the ancient city of Matera, once the capital of the region, now the set of the forthcoming remake of *Ben-Hur* and a World Heritage Centre. See page 32.



FLEUR KINSON has been writing about the Italian property market since the launch of *Italia!* over ten years ago. In this issue she heads to the north of the country. Though

based in Piedmont she explores options across the northwest, where true bargains can be found if you know where to look. Read her guide, which starts on page 20.



LAURA MCLEAN is best known as *Italia!*'s Senior Sales Executive, but she is also an experienced and widely-published journalist. Given her love of gastronomy she was ideally

placed to embark on a tour of the Amalfi Coast, exploring the unique foods, drinks, dishes and restaurants the region has to offer. Join her on page 42.



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With the euro still struggling against the pound, there are currently some unusually cheap properties in Italy.

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Laura McLean takes a five-day gourmet trip to the Amalfi Coast to discover the finest food in the best locations.



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The gondola is a beautiful object, historic and artistic, writes **Freya Middleton**.

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Catherine Sidwell walks south in Florence, through the Oltrarno to the Pitti Palace to explore the Boboli Gardens.

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Frederick Stibbert admired the accoutrements of war. **Joe Gartman** introduces the Collector.

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James Miller meets Nicoletta and Gioacchino, the Duchess and Duke of Palma, at their home in Palermo, the Palazzo Lanza Tomasi.

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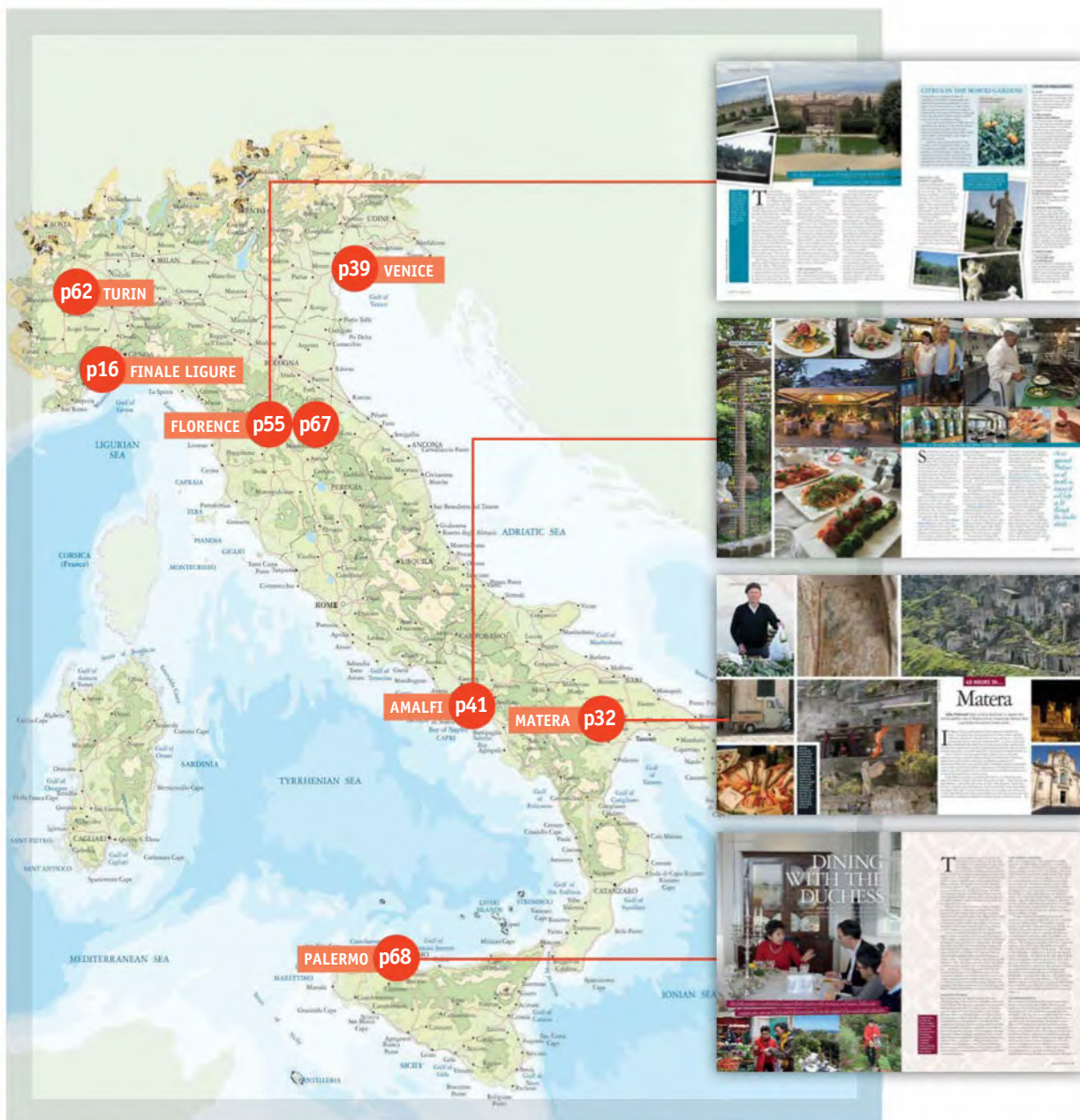
Paul Pettengale tastes some Friuli whites.



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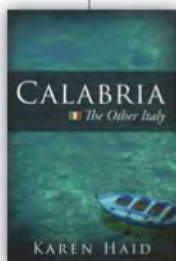
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ON THE COVER



YOUR ITALIA!

READERS' PHOTO COMPETITION!

Send us your favourite photos from your Italian travels, and each month the best photo will win a bottle of **Nino Franco Rustico Prosecco** and cooler!*



▲ THIS MONTH'S WINNER

Hugo and Diana Seno, Melbourne, Victoria

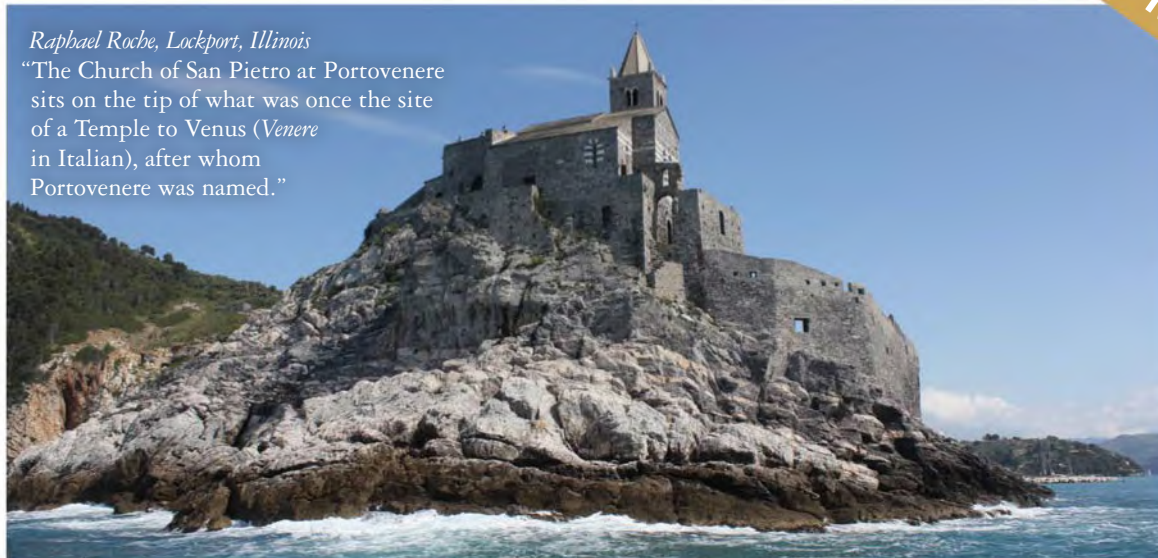
"The last rays of sunshine beam over the Dolomite mountains while driving through Val Gardena in the Veneto region."



WIN!
NINO FRANCO RUSTICO
PROSECCO & CHILLER*

Raphael Rocbe, Lockport, Illinois

"The Church of San Pietro at Portovenere sits on the tip of what was once the site of a Temple to Venus (*Venere* in Italian), after whom Portovenere was named."



▼ *Angela Moonan, Pulaski, New York*
"Magical, timeless renaissance gardens at the Villa Lante, Caprarola. My time in Italy was truly magical and I cannot wait to return this summer!"



▲ *Trish Fuell, Fakenham, Norfolk*

"I attach a shot from Bologna, of a very colourful fruit and vegetable stall, taken on a tour of central Italy last year."



◀ *Michael Lawton, by email*

"My sister and wife riding the chair lift on Capri, on a beautiful June day last year. The views from the top are spectacular."



▲ *Kieran McKeown, Slough, Berkshire*

"Early morning peace and quiet, just around the corner from a bustling Rialto fish market in Venice."

HOW TO ENTER Email high-resolution (300dpi) jpegs of your photos of Italy to italia@anthem-publishing.com or send prints to 'Reader Photo Competition' at the address given on page 18. Please include a brief explanation of your photo, plus your name, delivery address and a phone number (for our couriers). You must be over 18 to enter.

READER OFFER *Italia!* readers get a 10 per cent discount off Nino Franco wines from www.sommelierschoice.com until 1 December 2015 by entering the code 'italia10' at the checkout.

Please note: Any photos you submit must be your own work and you must have the right to send them for inclusion on this page. By sending your entry, you are confirming that *Italia!*'s use of your photo(s) will not constitute infringement of any rights, and confirming that you are over 18.



*Prosecco and cooler delivered to mainland UK addresses only

THIS MONTH

August 2015

In **Italian news** this month, a record-breaking astronaut returns to Earth, while a record-breaking tiramusù is made in Udine...



OSCAR LOSES HIS RAGU

Oscar Farinetti has made his fortune as founder of the world-famous Eataly restaurant and supermarket chain, so you'd expect him to know a thing or two about food quality. And his verdict on the cuisine served up at Italian restaurants in the UK is damning. He criticised the prominent use of cheap pasta sauces and bad parmesan, and claimed that it was damaging Italy's ability to export its home-grown ingredients. "In Italy, spaghetti bolognese will have 90g of spaghetti and 85g of ragu," said Farinetti, who founded Eataly in Turin in 2007. "In the UK, in an Italian restaurant that's not really Italian, you get 80g of spaghetti and 200g of ragu. It's important that people start to recognise real Italian products. Foreign citizens must learn what is real pasta, real extra virgin olive oil, real Parmigiano Reggiano and not the imitation." Farinetti is due to open a new branch of Eataly in London in 2017.



Photograph: Press Association Images / Luca Bruno



SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...



ITALIAN EXPORTS HIT HARD BY RUSSIAN SANCTIONS

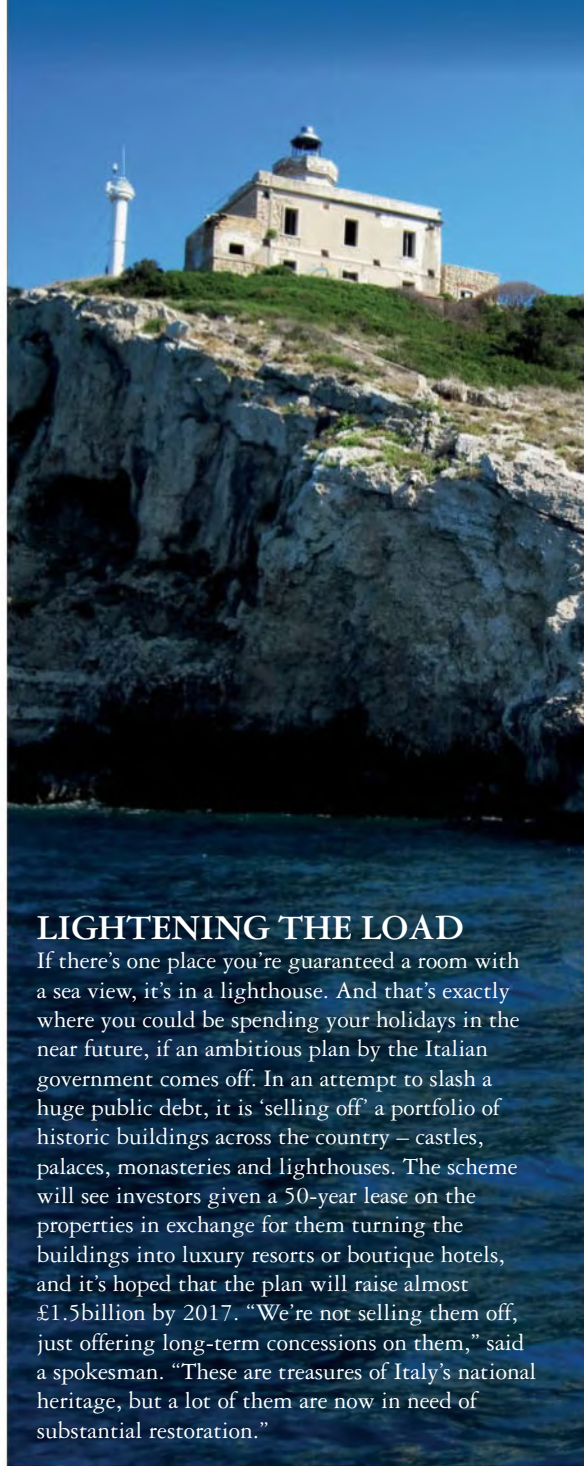
The true cost of Europe's fractious relationship with Russia is beginning to emerge. According to a report on the Bloomberg Business website, Italy has lost around €1.3 billion as a result of Vladimir Putin banning his people from buying foreign foods. The ban was put in place in retaliation for the US and Europe slapping sanctions on Russia following Putin's controversial push into the Ukraine, and it's hit Italian producers hard. Exports like Parma ham and parmesan cheese – which have traditionally thrived in the Russian market – have ground to a halt. "We are worried and afraid," commented Italian Industry Minister Federica Guidi.

DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT US!

Most people who miss their plane cuss under their breath and head to the nearest bar to wait for the next one. But not Italian holidaymakers Matteo Clementi and Enrica Apollonio. After getting stuck in traffic en route to Luqa airport in Malta, they arrived to find that their Ryanair plane back to Italy was leaving without them – so they ran onto the runway and tried to flag it down. Clementi, 26, and Apollonio, 23 (who was celebrating her birthday), were arrested and spent the night in a police cell. They were later fined €2,329.



Armchair football fans are used to seeing sponsor's logos appearing on the pitch during matches, but those watching Italy's recent Euro 2016 qualifying match against Croatia in Split got more than they bargained for – bleached into the turf at the Stadion Poljud was a large swastika. It's believed that the Nazi symbol was imprinted into the pitch in the 48 hours before the game. And, though the tie was being played behind closed doors following crowd trouble at the corresponding fixture between the sides at Milan's San Siro stadium in November, it seems that those responsible wanted their handiwork to be seen by viewers on television. "We expect police to identify the perpetrators," said a spokesman from the Croatian football federation. "This is a disgrace for the whole of Croatia." The match finished 1-1, which means Italy sit in second place in their group with four games to play.



If there's one place you're guaranteed a room with a sea view, it's in a lighthouse. And that's exactly where you could be spending your holidays in the near future, if an ambitious plan by the Italian government comes off. In an attempt to slash a huge public debt, it is 'selling off' a portfolio of historic buildings across the country – castles, palaces, monasteries and lighthouses. The scheme will see investors given a 50-year lease on the properties in exchange for them turning the buildings into luxury resorts or boutique hotels, and it's hoped that the plan will raise almost £1.5 billion by 2017. "We're not selling them off, just offering long-term concessions on them," said a spokesman. "These are treasures of Italy's national heritage, but a lot of them are now in need of substantial restoration."

ESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP P



The next time you spread some Nutella on your toast, you could be damaging the environment. Think that sounds nuts? Try telling France's Ecology Minister Segolene Royal. She claimed recently that the prevalent use of palm oil in the western world has led to widespread deforestation in south-east Asia, and urged people to boycott palm-oil-based products like Nutella. However, politicians in Italy have come out in defence of the Italian-made chocolate spread. Roberto Calderoli, a senator with the Northern League, said, "We grew up with Nutella and we'll never give it up. If the French don't want to eat it, too bad for them; they don't know what they're missing."

The Italian Grand Prix could soon be split between Monza and Imola, F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone has revealed. The event has been held at Monza since the F1 Championship began in 1950 (with the exception of 1980, when it was held at Imola), but the circuit's contract expires next year, and it's believed that the Lombardy-based venue is struggling to raise sufficient funds to extend it. Dividing the prestigious event between Monza and Imola – which staged the San Marino Grand Prix between 1981 and 2006 – would ease the financial burden somewhat, and officials recently met with Ecclestone in Monaco to thrash out a deal. Said the 84-year-old, "Imola proposes an alternation with Monza. It can be done."



UNIQUE CULINARY ADVENTURES IN SICILY

Aeolian Adventures offers unique cooking and wine-tasting holidays in Sicily. A seven-night six-day all-inclusive gastronomical tour with cooking lessons, wine tastings and trips to local producers. Our destination are the Aeolian Islands, a volcanic archipelago, made up of seven islands, scattered off the northeast tip of Sicily, in the sparkling azure waters of the Mediterranean Sea. All astonishingly beautiful, with an identity all their own, the Aeolian archipelago was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.



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ITALIA!'S

Top picks

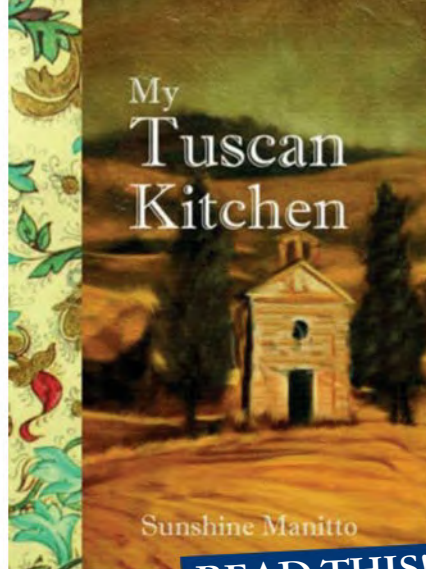
Whether or not you will be spending your **summer holidays in Italy**, there are plenty of little treats to enjoy that will give you a dash of *dolce vita* this August...

SOMETHING ITALIAN SAUCES

Fancy tucking into a tasty Italian meal but don't have the time to rustle it up from scratch? Well, don't get your fusilli in a twist – renowned restaurant chain Cipriani has come to the rescue with a range of yummy sauces that will give you the fresh taste sensations of an authentic Italian eatery within minutes. Our favourite is the Bizantina (£4.75 for 340g), a spicy sauce containing green olives, capers and anchovies. Intense yet delicate, it'll add pizzazz to even the quickest of lunches. www.something-italian.com



EAT THIS!



MY TUSCAN KITCHEN

Many people leave Tuscany wishing they could recreate at home the dishes they have discovered there. Sunshine Manitto helps you do just that with *My Tuscan Kitchen* (New Holland, £16.99). A former chef at the Osteria Baralla and Locanda di Bacco restaurants in Lucca, Manitto shows you how to make everything from starters to mains with meat, fish and vegetables. www.amazon.co.uk

READ THIS!



Photograph © iStock

EXPLORE LAKE GARDA – VIRTUALLY ▲

If there's one thing that'll make your commute to work more bearable, it's dreaming of being somewhere beautiful. Download the new Explore Lake Garda app on your smartphone or tablet, and you'll soon be transported to one of Italy's most picturesque spots. With the help of 3D interactive maps, you can explore towns like Riva, Limone, Malcesine and Bardolino, discovering key points of interest, or you can just take a stroll in the surrounding countryside, accompanied by the sound of gently lapping water and distant church bells. You won't even notice that your (real-life) bus is stuck in traffic! Find the app at www.thomsonlakes.co.uk

TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...

Top 3 Italian BEACH ACCESSORIES

Sunning it up on the sand will be even more pleasurable when you have these stylish items to hand...

1 PERSOL SUNGLASSES

If you want to look stylish while you sunbathe, a pair of Persol shades on your nose is a good place to start. The company, founded by Giuseppe Ratti in Turin back in 1917, has provided protective eyewear for fighter pilots, racing drivers and astronauts, not to mention stars such as Greta Garbo and Steve McQueen. The latter has been honoured with a range of shades bearing his name. We particularly love the Light Havana pair with polarised lenses (pictured). Prices vary, www.persol.com/uk



▼ DELUXE WASH BAG FOR MEN

Whether the man in your life is on holiday or a business trip, he'll feel better equipped with one of these deluxe Italian leather wash bags in his luggage. Made using the old-school method of tumbling, it's as durable as it is stylish. There are two separate compartments – a larger one for his razor, toothbrush, etc, and a smaller one for more valuable belongings, such as cuff links – while a grab handle makes it easy for him to carry the bag from bedroom to bathroom. £79.95, www.prezzybox.com



GIVE THIS!

Photograph © Gareth Fuller / Press Association Images



◀ CRUISE THE ADRIATIC SEA

Nothing floats our boat more than the thought of departing Venice aboard the Queen Victoria. This is the sumptuous prospect awaiting those who book themselves on Cunard's forthcoming 14-night cruise (22 August to 15 September), which also takes in the Greek islands and Istanbul. The Queen Vic is opulence personified – a marriage of elegant marbles, woods and fabrics, along with all the mod cons you could ever wish for. You truly will feel like royalty. From £1,099 per person, www.cunard.co.uk



FREE COFFEE MACHINE!

Delicious coffee is great – delicious FREE coffee is even better! One lucky *Italia!* reader will be getting exactly that, as we're giving away a De'Longhi Dedica coffee machine in our prize draw. Whether you fancy a well-balanced shot of espresso or a long, creamy latte, you can make it at home with this luxurious traditional pump machine. The only thing you'll have to supply is the coffee beans! To stand a chance of winning this great prize, visit www.italytravelandlife.com/delonghi-competition

IN THE MARKET FOR A NEW FERRARI?

The *Italia!* staff have been going slightly weak at the knees at the thought of driving the new Ferrari 488 GTB. The 3.9-litre, 661bhp car – which replaces the 458 Italia – is the marque's first mid-engined twin-turbo since the F40 (the one that graced many a teenage boy's bedroom wall in the late-'80s). Top speed is in excess of 205mph, while 0-62mph is reached in a bone-rattling 3.0 seconds, which is considerably faster than it would take us to save the £182,000 (before options!) to buy one.



THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS

2 SORRENTO BEACH TOWEL

Some say the sun always shines in Sorrento. It doesn't, of course, but it'll certainly feel like it if you're carrying this summery beach towel on your holidays with you. Based on a vintage tourism poster, it perfectly captures the joie de vivre of the popular Campanian coastal town, with its warm climate, street entertainment and yachts shimmering in the breeze. And it's practical, too, made of lightweight and durable 100 per cent softened polyester. Your beach bag will soon feel lost without it. £26, www.cafepress.co.uk



3 CANFORA SANDALS

Just off the coast of Sorrento is the wondrous island of Capri, home to secluded coves, tropical gardens... and the famous Canfora sandals. Handmade to order, this footwear is every bit as elegant and exclusive as the island on which it's made, and it's been worn by everyone from Jackie Kennedy to Maria Callas. With so many beautiful styles to choose from, picking a favourite is a task. But we'll go for the Greta (pictured), a gorgeously understated design whose 'pebble' strap is tailor-made for seaside sorties. Prices vary, www.canfora.com/en



EVENTS IN AUGUST 2015

Most of the locals will be on holiday in **Italy this month** so there are lots of summer events and festivals to enjoy. It's not all seasonal though – watch out for snow in Rome and rugby in Turin...

FESTA DELLA MADONNA DELLA NEVE

5 August
Rome

Let it snow! Let it snow! Let it snow! No, we haven't gone completely mad – this annual festival celebrates the miraculous summer snowstorm that occurred in Rome in the 4th century AD, an event that inspired awe-struck locals to erect a church, the magnificent Santa Maria Maggiore, as a token of thanks. The festival, based around the church, is as spectacular as it is unusual: expect themed sound and light shows, tourists in fancy dress and, of course, lots of (fake) snow.

CATANIA TANGO FESTIVAL

8-16 August
Catania

No, not the fizzy orange drink... this annual festival, now in its 15th year, celebrates one of the world's most passionate dance styles, with concerts, workshops and events across the Sicilian city of Catania. Whether you want to learn fresh moves or meet new dance partners, there's something on the programme for you. If you have the energy, the final dance at the

Lido Azzurro on Sunday 16 August goes right through till dawn! www.cataniatango festival.com/en

FEAST OF SAN LORENZO

10 August
Florence

The San Lorenzo church – reckoned to be the oldest in Florence – is the focal point for this annual event which celebrates the life of Saint Lawrence, a 3rd-century Christian martyr. The day begins with a procession from the Piazza di Parte Guelfa to the church. Then there's a service at the basilica, before the festivities kick off again at night with a classical concert by the Florence Philharmonic Orchestra, and a free outdoor feast of pasta and watermelon.

PALIO DEI NORMANNI

12-14 August

Piazza Armerina

Famous Rogers are few and far between (we can think of Federer and Whittaker), but the residents of Sicilian town Piazza Armerina don't care. For them, there's only one that matters, and that's Count Roger. As part of an overall conquest of Sicily, the Norman nobleman liberated the comune from the Moors in 1091. To celebrate, the town holds an annual pageant complete with a costumed procession, a re-enactment of Roger's feat and a spectacular inter-district joust.

FESTA DEI CANDELIERI

14 August
Sassari

Being rescued from the plague is a cause worth celebrating – which is why the townspeople of Sassari, Sardinia, have been doing so for hundreds of years. Back in the 16th century, the island was ravaged by the disease, so the locals sought divine intervention from the Virgin Mary. Lo and behold, on 14 August their plight came to an end. On this day every year, a carnival snakes through town, complete with giant candles, tambourine playing, garlands and flags.

FERRAGOSTO

15 August
Nationwide

You're sure to see a lot of happy faces, and a lot of shuttered shop windows, across Italy today: Ferragosto is a national holiday, and many people flock to the beach to enjoy some summer sun. The tradition (which corresponds with the religious holiday of Assumption) was introduced by Emperor Augustus in 18 BC to give his people some much-needed respite from their graft, and it's been greeted with exuberance by overworked Italians ever since.



Palio dell'Assunta, Siena



Photograph "Palio - Cartica dei carabinieri" by William Domenichini - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

THE DUKE'S FESTIVAL

16 August
Urbino

The historic walled city of Urbino, Le Marche, is well worth a visit, and especially while its annual Duke's Festival is on. Celebrating the life of Duke Federico da Montefeltro, who restructured the city during the Renaissance period, it features everything from traditional craft workshops to street performers, market stalls to jousting tournaments. And it ends with a bang, too, thanks to a spectacular fireworks display.

PALIO DELL'ASSUNTA

16 August
Siena

If you missed Siena's famous horse race in July, don't fret, as it's held for a second time today. The one difference is that this one is dedicated to the Virgin Mary; otherwise, it's pretty much a carbon copy – following an elegant, costumed parade, jockeys representing ten of the city's 17 neighbourhoods race their horses around three laps of the Piazza del Campo. The first horse over the finishing line – whether it still has its rider on board or not – takes the honours. www.thepalio.com

AD 1398

16-23 August
Volterra

In the historic Tuscan town of Volterra they take their week-long annual medieval festival very seriously. Visitors can hire costumes so they don't feel left out of the fun, and the residents even produce their own medieval currency, which you can buy with euros and then use to enjoy the authentic food and entertainment from the period. While the event stretches for eight days, it's the two book-ending Sundays when the key festivities happen. www.volterratur.it/en/volterra-a-d-1398/

INTERNATIONAL RUGBY: ITALY VS SCOTLAND

22 August
Turin

No one in their right mind would give Italy a chance of winning this year's Rugby World Cup, but that won't stop fans turning up in their thousands to the Olympic Stadium in Turin to watch the national team prepare for the big event with this warm-up match against Scotland. The Scots aren't exactly a rugby superpower either, so even though the Italians won't win the World Cup, they might well grab a morale-boosting victory here.

ELBOW

25 August
Florence

Guy Garvey and his band have become one of Britain's most popular acts in recent years, scooping the Mercury Music Prize in 2008 and recording the BBC theme for the 2012 London Olympics. Tonight, they perform at Florence's new state-of-the-art outdoor venue, the Cavea del Nuovo Opera di Firenze. The set is expected to include tracks off their chart-topping recent album *The Take Off And Landing Of Everything*, as well as some of their hits.

BRAVIO DELLE BOTTI

30 August
Montepulciano, Tuscany

The residents of Montepulciano, Tuscany, have probably never heard the song *Roll Out The Barrel*, but if they had, you can bet your bottom dollar they'd be singing it today. The Bravio delle Botti, dating back to 1373, is a barrel-rolling race that sees contestants from the town's eight neighbourhoods competing for a painted cloth banner. The main event is sandwiched by a costumed procession and a street banquet. Should be a barrel of laughs!

Please note that the dates of all events are subject to change. If you plan to attend, check events are going ahead before you travel. All attempts are made to present the correct details.



VIEWPOINT

Famed for its white sand beaches and dramatic sea views, the Ligurian resort of **Finale Ligure** is popular with sun-seekers – and also with cyclists, of both the on-road and off-road variety...

In stark contrast to the lazy days and white linen lifestyle of the French Riviera just a few miles down the road from here, the Italian Riviera town of Finale Ligure is something of a cycling mecca, with easy to access bike hire in town (indeed, driving here is sometimes more hassle than it's worth, with the town's narrow streets and almost unintelligible one-way system) and some challenging mountain bike courses out of town, particularly around the famous

Rock of Caprazoppa, a steep limestone outcrop to the southwest of town. The nearest airports are at Genoa and Nice. From Genoa there is a direct train service, from Nice you have to change at Ventimiglia. You don't have to search very hard on YouTube to find plenty of videos that will give you a sense of what it's like to cycle round here. Yes, it gets hot in summer, but it's not as hot as some parts of Italy – and the sea breezes help keep you cool.





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LETTERS TO ITALIA!

Share your Italian experiences with us, and tell us what you would like to see in the magazine, by sending your photographs and letters to italia@anthem-publishing.com...



Photograph © iStock

Ragusa: Montalbano country is very accessible for a long weekend away.

THOMAS OF SICILY

Did you know that Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, Chancellor and one time great friend of Henry II until the archbishop failed to accept the Constitutions of Clarendon in which the king set himself as head of the church, had a strong link with Sicily? Proof is to be found within the spectacular Norman cathedral at Monreale.

The cathedral and cloisters at Monreale, along with the cathedral at Cefalù, are recognised as the island's greatest Norman buildings. Within Monreale Cathedral there are in excess of 6,000 square metres of mosaic, created by highly-skilled Byzantine craftsmen. Because of his greater love for the Church over the king, Thomas and other clerics went into self exile in both France and Sicily at the court of William II of Sicily and his mother, Margaret of Navarre.

The English connection with Sicily reached a climax around 1168 when Henry II wanted to arrange a marriage for his youngest daughter, Joan, who was only a toddler at the time, to William II, who was also a minor. However, on Becket's return to England, where he hoped to re-kindle his friendship with the king, he was murdered on 29 December 1170 in Canterbury Cathedral by four knights who believed the king wanted to be rid of this "meddlesome priest". The marriage that Thomas had helped to secure was then called off, though in 1177 the two young people were finally married.

When Thomas had been canonised, he was remembered in Sicily in two different ways: he is the Patron Saint of the Duomo in Marsala and a full mosaic was created in the main apse of the Cathedral of Monreale, two rows below Christ Pantocrator and

the second on the right in the line of saints as you look at the altar. He is the saint depicted in green and you can read the letters: SCS THO.

In 1220, in Canterbury, Becket's bones were moved to a new gold-plated and bejewelled shrine behind the high altar, the gold being somewhat reminiscent of the gold tesserae in Monreale.

I have visited Monreale before and spent a great deal of time gazing in wonder at the creativity of those master craftsmen. A friend mentioned she thought there was a connection with Thomas of Canterbury. It was only on our last visit, two weeks ago, that this discovery was confirmed and we came face to face with his mosaic.

Catherine Crehan, Rotherham



Thomas Becket, in Sicily

MONTH LETTER OF THE
AUG 2015

AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE?

Italy is a small country, so getting to the places you wish to experience is not all that difficult. We rent a Fiat when we go and I drive 1,000 to 2,000 miles per trip. We love taking the back roads around Abruzzo. We keep to the hill towns and villages and eat in local trattorias. We're definitely of the opinion that it's better to experience Italy rather than just see Italy.

John Dodge, via Facebook

We're guessing you're American, John, if you perceive Italy as a 'small' country! To us Brits it seems relatively large. But you're right: you can't beat getting off the main track.

PRINT AND DIGITAL COPIES

I just wanted to echo Roddy Dyce's comments in the March issue regarding print and digital copies. I actually have the reverse problem to Roddy whereby I have a digital subscription on my iPad but my wife would like to read each issue and it would be so much easier to share a print copy while still having the ability to have my digital copy when I'm on the road. Is there any chance of a subscription covering both formats?

Stuart Pepper, via email

At present we're afraid we're still unable to offer 'dual format' subscriptions to Italia!, although we appreciate there are other publications that offer this service. It's something we'll look into for the near future.

PRONTO MEALS IN MINUTES

Thank you for introducing your 'Pronto' section of quick-to-cook recipes in *Italia!*.

As a mother of four young children I find it hard to find the time to come up with healthy, nutritious meals every evening without visiting the supermarket. Your selection of recipes is superb and has transformed our meal times. Please continue with this section.

Patricia Enright, via email

We shall. Turn to page 84 for five fantastic risottos.

ITALY IN THE SPRING TIME

I take my family to Italy every year as being American Italians I think it's important for our children to experience some of their heritage. Although my

family harks from Naples we love visiting Florence, Rome and Milan. Usually we travel in August because that's when it's least disruptive to my business, but this year we decided to make the journey (via Paris – lovely!) in May. What a difference! I always thought that the Italian cities were busy all year round, but everywhere was so much quieter and easier to get around in May compared to the height of summer. And the flights and hotels were cheaper too. So, fellow Americans, if you're going to Italy I urge you to go out of season. It'll save you dollars and the experience will be that much more enjoyable.

Dirk Staple, Illinois

MONTALBANO COUNTRY

We are great fans of the TV series *Montalbano* and think the places where the series is set look absolutely beautiful. Can you tell us where exactly in Sicily this is?


Phil Meadows, via email


Though the show is set in Agrigento, much of it is actually filmed in Ragusa. If you want to visit, we suggest speaking to Ospitalità Diffusa (www.siciliaospitalitadiffusa.it) as they specialise in low-cost accommodation in that part of Sicily.


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Homes in The North

The vine-clad hills of Piedmont, the Lakes Garda, Como and Maggiore, the hills of the central lands, the skiing paradise that is the Dolomites, and the sophistication of the Italian Riviera – northern Italy has it all. **Fleur Kinson** looks at property around the polished top of the boot...

One of the things we all love about Italy is its dazzling variety. This is a very regional country, where a journey of a few dozen miles can deliver a whole new landscape, dialect, cuisine and building style. It can be hard to make generalizations about Italy when there are so many different 'Italies'. But it's considerably easier to generalize if you cut the nation into three parts – the north, the centre and the south. Certain characteristics are more reliably typical of each.

Take the north. This is generally an orderly, affluent and highly sophisticated place – with spectacular scenery to boot. It's the economic powerhouse of Italy, the home of the nation's fashion, design, media and tech industries. It's also a locus of cultured leisure – the heartland of opera-going and a hotbed of gourmet food-production. Northern Italy offers an extremely high quality of life: well-paced and sustainable.

Piedmont, to take one northern Italian region, does much to protect and propagate European-style *savoir-vivre*. The region is home to the famous Slow Food Society and its offshoot Slow Cities movement – globally championing good eating and good living. Among other things, Piedmont's immaculate rural spaces yield Italy's most highly esteemed red wine (Barolo), and the world's best

white truffles. Its small 'Le Langhe' area purportedly has more Michelin-starred restaurants than any similarly-sized chunk of the world.

With magnificent Alpine slopes to its north, rolling vine-striped hills to its south and charming settlements scattered everywhere, Piedmont was growing very popular with foreign homebuyers in the years leading up to 2008. Then, as with elsewhere in Italy, the market slowed considerably as a result of global economic woes, and has only recently begun to rally. Buyers are returning in good numbers now, and many of them are spending big. Piedmont still represents excellent value-for-money. It has great weather, immense rural charm, and comparatively short journey times from the UK and elsewhere in northern Europe.

PIEDMONT

Roughly what kind of figures might you expect to pay for property in Piedmont these days? Small homes in a village or in the countryside start at about €60,000. Habitable farmhouses get going at around €150,000 and work their way up to as much as €700,000 – depending on size and lavishness of restoration. €300,000 could get you an independent farmhouse with great views and a vineyard. €200,000 could buy a prime-sited farmhouse ➤

Le Langhe is ultra-desirable, but it can be hard to find property here





Monferrato – Montferrat in Piedmontese – tends to have lower prices than Le Langhe



IMPERIA

Type of property **Apartments**

Number of bedrooms **1-2**

Price **€281,000-€485,000**

Location **Imperia**

Contact **Casa Travella Ltd.** ☎ 01322 660988

www.casatravella.com

Newly built 1 and 2 bedroom apartments in an exclusive residence of 7 apartments 300 metres from the sea, with sea views, in the Porto Maurizio area of Imperia, 1 hour from Nice airport. The apartments, which are of varying sizes, have been finished to a high standard, each with its own entrance, solar panelling for water heating and central heating, use of a shared swimming pool and garage and parking spaces. Apt 2 is about 54sqm and provides open plan living with corner kitchen; bedroom; bathroom; terrace of a further 10sqm, private garden and parking space for €281,000. Apt 4 is about 80sqm and provides open plan living with corner kitchen; 2 bedrooms; bathroom; terrace of a further 17sqm; private garden and parking space for €485,000. Ref: 3682.



OSSUCCIO

Type of property **Apartment**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€490,000**

Location **Ossuccio**

Contact **Casa Travella Ltd.** ☎ 01322 660988

www.casatravella.com

This lovely 2 bedroom luxury apartment is located in a small residence in Ossuccio, one of the most sought after areas of Lake Como and with stunning views over the lake. The spacious property provides accommodation as follows: Enormous open plan living accommodation with separate kitchen area and large French windows leading to the balcony and private garden with lake views, 2 bedrooms, and 2 bathrooms. The apartment also benefits from private parking and use of the communal swimming pool. The property is close to all amenities, just a stone's throw from the lake and conveniently located just 1 hour from Milan's Malpensa airport, and is being sold furnished. An ideal property for personal use or as an investment and rental. Ref: 3304.



*Lake Garda offers real waterside
ambience and a wonderfully mild climate*

needing some repair-work. On Lake Maggiore, one-bedroom apartments in converted period villas might ask €150,000, two-beds €200,000. Ski properties in Piedmont's Alps come in a very wide range of prices, with some studio apartments asking less than €100,000 and some large

houses for sale around these towns. The Monferrato and Roero areas are less desirable than Le Langhe and so prices tend to be lower. The area of Moncalvo is great; its prices are lower and nice houses come up for sale. The cheapest and least interesting part of Le Langhe is around Cortemilia."

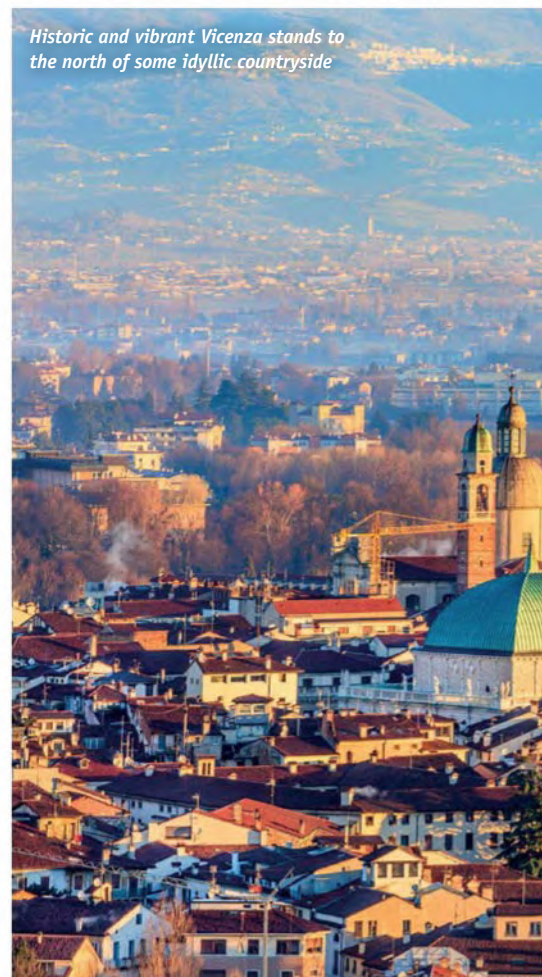
Property prices on the northern lakes can be high, but reasonably-priced homes can be found

three-bed flats going for €400,000 or more. It seems that there's going to be something in Piedmont to suit most budgets.

Obviously where you choose to buy in Piedmont depends on your preferred type of landscape. Only you know whether you want a ski property, a lakeside home, a city apartment or a house in the countryside. A large proportion of British buyers in Piedmont favour the last on that list, so they've looked to the region's verdant southeast – where magnificent hilly countryside is dotted with lovely towns, and a legendary food culture holds sway. Key recommended areas of the southeast include Le Langhe, Roero, Moncalvo and Monferrato.

Different price ranges dominate these four areas, and Richard Edwards of the agency Langhe.Property offers these insider tips: "The Le Langhe area is the most expensive, especially around the towns of Monforte, Serralunga, Diano, Barolo and Montelupo. But it's very hard to find

*Historic and vibrant Vicenza stands to
the north of some idyllic countryside*



HILLS AND LAKES

If it's a rural idyll you're after, southeastern Piedmont isn't the only part of northern Italy you should investigate. Head over to the Veneto region (home of Venice and Verona) and have a good look at the Berici Hills south of Vicenza, the vineyard-striped Lessini Hills northwest of Verona, and the wonderful domed Euganean Hills south of Padua – all of which have already attracted quite a few British ex-pats over the last fifteen years or so. Leafy, rural places situated within easy reach of lovely little cities, these areas have a lot going for them, and are still very reasonably priced. You might pay as little as €120,000 for a fully-restored small farmhouse, or €100,000 for a large, unrestored one.

One of northern Italy's greatest attractions, of course, is its widely-scattered clutch of lakes. You're probably familiar with Lakes Garda, Como and Maggiore, and perhaps also with Lakes Orta, Lugano and other northern beauties. These lakes and their surrounds constitute some of the prettiest and most romantic places in all of Europe, and have been adored by international visitors for

more than a century. Elegant villas grace the shorelines, leafy green slopes plunge into sparkling blue water, high mountains dream in the distance... Sigh. It's heady stuff. Property prices on the well-known northern lakes can be high, but not everywhere, and reasonably-priced homes can certainly be found. Considering re-sale value and holiday rentability, properties on the northern lakes represent good value-for-money.

Straddling Lombardy and the Veneto regions, Lake Garda is the largest and most visited of the northern lakes, and also generally the most expensive for property – especially along its northerly shores, where the landscape is more dramatic and mountainous than in the cheaper, flatter south. You might find a one-bedroom home with a shared pool near the southern shore for about €160,000, or a two-bedroom home from €200,000. Far over in Lombardy, Lake Como is a particularly delicious spot – perhaps the most beautiful of all the lakes. Prices are generally highest in its south and southwest, and lowest in its north. Stately old Lake Maggiore, straddling Lombardy ➤



DIANO MARINA

Type of property **Villa**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€450,000**

Location **Diano Marina**

Contact **Casa Travella Ltd. ☎ 01322 660988**

www.casatravella.com

This 2 bedroom rustic style detached villa of recent construction provides a main living area of about 51sqm over two floors: Ground floor: Entrance porch, open plan living room with kitchen to view, storage room. First floor: Master bedroom with large bathroom. The property, which is alarmed, also benefits from a separate large *taverna* of about 49sqm which has a living area with dining area and kitchen to view, bedroom and bathroom/laundry room, as well as a storage room of a further 37sqm and a garage of a further 51sqm. The entrance has a covered portico of about 11sqm with a further terrace/solarium on the first floor of a further 10sqm. The property sits in about 1,100sqm of terraced garden with views towards Diano Gorleri and the sea. Ref: 3553.



CLASSICAL CASCINA NEAR ACQUI TERME

Type of property **Cascina**

Number of bedrooms **3**

Price **€280,000**

Location **Monte Vidon Corrado**

Contact **Eli Anne at Case in Piemonte**

caseinpiemonte@gmail.com

Just outside the thermal city, in a small hamlet, is this *cascina* of 300sqm with a garden of 1,000sqm. Owned and renovated by an English couple, the garden is a true beauty with both sunny and shady spots, and is of course the perfect place for watching the sunset with a nice glass of wine. The house consists of a spacious living room, a luminous kitchen with dining area and a wood burning stove, a guest room and a bathroom on the ground floor. The beautiful double staircase leads to the first floor where there are 3 bedrooms, one of which is used a library, a bathroom and a lovely terrace, there is also a wonderful closed-in terrace off the master bedroom. At the back of the house is an open porch used for storage and parking. Reference CP-711 – Acqui Terme





*If it's a skiing getaway
you're after, consider the Dolomites*



THE PERFECT HOLIDAY HOME

Type of property **Cascina**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€165,000**

Location **Vigliano d'Asti**

Contact **Eli Anne at Case in Piemonte**
caseinpiemonte@gmail.com

Just outside the village of Vigliano d'Asti we find this independent and recently renovated cascina. The property enjoys a tranquil charming position with great views and a large private garden of more than 6,000 sqm. The nice and well kept courtyard offers room for outside dining and a small swimming pool, while the rest of the land stretches out in the back of the house with several fruit and olive trees. The house consists of a spacious living/dining area, a kitchen and a bathroom on the ground floor, and two bedrooms on the first floor. There is a classical cantina with vaulted ceilings in the basement. This is the perfect place for a relaxing holiday! Reference CP-657 – Vigliano

and Piedmont, is especially good for period villas, many of which have been converted into reasonably-priced apartments. On all the lakes, prices generally sink the further you are situated from the actual waterside.

HIT THE SLOPES

Blessed with the mighty Alps and the spectacular Dolomites, northern Italy offers some of the best skiing in Europe – indeed in the world. There's a laid-back, fun-loving

especially Cortina d'Ampezzo can be very pricey. But lesser-known resorts are numerous and often superb as well as much cheaper. It's possible to get a studio or one-bedroom apartment for under €100,000, or a three-bed for under €150,000. In a popular resort such as Sestriere, however, a two-bed chalet might ask €300,000. Note that Italian buyers and visitors like to be situated in the very heart of a ski resort if possible, so property prices drop considerably if you buy even just

*Ski properties are often surprisingly affordable,
and offer very strong holiday rental prospects.*

culture on the slopes, and a friendly, stylish atmosphere in the resorts. Ski properties are often surprisingly affordable, and, like lake and coastal properties, they offer very strong holiday rental prospects. Winter is obviously the key time for this (you could expect to rent out a ski-oriented property for about fourteen winter weeks, asking perhaps €650 per week for a studio apartment and €1,200 for a two-bed), but summer hikers are also a possible clientele.

Property prices vary considerably depending on the resort. Famous places such as Courmayeur and

ten minutes away. You might also save money buying a mountain home needing some renovation, as Italian buyers prefer something modern and fully-functioning. You might find a one-bedroom house needing renovation for around €100,000, or a three-bed for €200,000.

Happily, Italy's north is home to several vast, interconnected networks of ski resorts, offering a great variety of slopes and valleys over a relatively small area. This means you don't need to buy in a large, famous resort to have access to an excellent range of slopes. ➤

Marc and Lucia Lambert bought in Piedmont in 2009



OUR HOME IN PIEDMONT

Marc and Lucia Lambert own a small country house near Alba in southern Piedmont. They enjoy long weekends there several times a year, making the short journey from their UK home in East Sussex, and also spend a month at the house in the summer and at Christmas time. They encourage friends and family to use the property when they're not there themselves.

What drew them to northern Italy? "Lucia's parents are Italian," Marc explains, "although she was born in England and has always lived here. She was raised bilingually, and became an Italian teacher – which is how I met her. I'd always loved Italy and Italian culture, and ten years ago I started studying the language at evening classes. She taught me how to speak it properly, and then we got married!"

"Lucia's parents are from Calabria in southern Italy, but we chose to buy a home in Piedmont because we're both serious foodies and we loved the idea of being in the Le Langhe area. We can go to a different, stunningly good restaurant every night. It's a real pleasure to be out there, and to see the care and attention that people give to food preparation, production, growing – all aspects of food. The standards of quality are so high. And then there's the culture of enjoying it. We love the relaxed pace of life out there, the friendliness and the strong sense of community.

"We bought our little house in 2009. We chose it for its lovely views across hilly fields and because it needed some restoration work – which we fancied doing, in order to make a house feel truly 'ours' in design. We thought the price was very good for what we got, so we were able to spend a bit more of our budget on the restoration. Our builders were excellent and they did a really brilliant job. We had to knock down a couple of internal walls, re-fit bathrooms and the kitchen, and thoroughly redecorate inside. Thankfully, the external walls and roof were all in good condition; I know those can be the most expensive things to fix. We have a bit of land, too, which we've had landscaped. There's no pool yet, but we keep thinking about it.

"The best thing, of course, is all the friends we've made out there now. Rural Piedmont doesn't have a great many English-speakers, it seems, and it's been an enormous boon that both Lucia and I can speak Italian. I'd recommend that anyone thinking of buying a home in Italy makes an effort to learn the language. Italians are tremendously friendly, and it would be so frustrating if you couldn't enjoy them to the full by having proper conversations with them!"



VILLA WITH POOL AND LAKE VIEW

Type of property **Villa**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€1,100,000**

Location **Baveno, Lake Maggiore**

Contact **SIS Real Estate** info@sis-realestate.it

☎ **+39 0323 31960** www.sis-realestate.it / www.ivangobetti.com

Modern villa of 400sqm with garden of about 900sqm and a magnificent view of the Gulf of Borromeo. Villa built on three levels consisting of: Second floor: entrance hall, open space, bathroom. First floor: kitchen, terrace, large living room, dining area, toilet. On the ground floor there is the sleeping area with master bedroom with a library corner and fireplace, bathroom with corner bathtub with hydromassage, large wardrobe; and a double bedroom with private bathroom. In the basement, there are two large rooms and a laundry. Also, large garage, swimming pool.



VILLA WITH PARK AND LAKE VIEW

Type of property **Villa**

Number of bedrooms **6**

Price **Upon request**

Location **Altire Stresa, Lake Maggiore**

Contact **SIS Real Estate** info@sis-realestate.it

☎ **+39 0323 31960** www.sis-realestate.it / www.ivangobetti.com

Charming villa of recent construction (2007) located on the hill above the town of Stresa, overlooking the Gulf of Borromeo. The villa consists of a spacious living room, dining room, kitchen, six spacious bedrooms, six bathrooms, large living room with panoramic view, study, garage for two cars and other service rooms such as laundry, central heat, walk-in closet. The finishes are top-notch with very particular details. The property includes large park of 8,000sqm surrounding the villa and ensuring privacy and tranquility. From every room of the property you can enjoy fabulous view of the lake.

PIEDMONT REGION GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

The second largest region of Italy, Piedmont, in the far northwest of Italy, gets its name from its location at the foot of the mountains. It is bordered on three sides by Alpine ranges with plenty of winter sports. The flat plain below the mountain ranges is a growing centre for industry as well as being renowned for the quality of its gastronomy and wine production. It is recognised for producing some of the best wine in the world; reds Barolo and Barbaresco are the most famous, but sparkling white Asti is a firm festive favourite. The truffle fairs of Alba also attract a global audience. The climate is continental in the mountainous north; the south of the region is just 30 miles from the Ligurian Riviera coast and much milder in winter.



THE ALPS

① To the west, about 60 miles from Turin, nestling in the Alps, are the twin valleys of Susa and Chisone, part of the evocatively named *Via Lattea* ('Milky Way'). This is the main winter sports area of Piedmont and is a skier's paradise with a network of resorts that offer over 400 miles of slopes and ski runs. It is also an important point in the Tour de France and Grio d'Italia bike races. The facilities and infrastructure here are modern and sophisticated. Access by car and public transport is easy as the main Italy-France road and rail connections run right through the Valle di Susa.

The main ski resorts are Sestriere and Bardonecchia. Sestriere was Italy's first purpose-built ski resort and is still the most fashionable. Bardonecchia is popular with snowboarding enthusiasts. But the summer in this stunning area is popular too as the natural beauty of the landscape lends itself to hiking and more seasonal outdoor pursuits. Monte Rosa and Monte Cervino (Matterhorn) to the northeast is another winter sports area that is worth exploring for properties.

TURIN

② Turin, the regional capital city of Piedmont, is situated in the wide flat plain of the River Po against the dramatic backdrop of the snow-peaked Alps. With a population of about a million inhabitants, this is an elegant baroque city with wide boulevards, arcaded walkways and attractive architecture. Home to a sophisticated café culture, Fiat cars and the Juventus football team, Turin also played host to the 2006 Winter Olympics. Cultural highlights include the largest collection of Ancient Egyptian artefacts outside Cairo and the (in)famous Turin Shroud. With the advent of cheap flights, Turin has become an accessible destination for long weekends, with diverse attractions like fine cuisine, art and culture – not forgetting the excellent shopping!

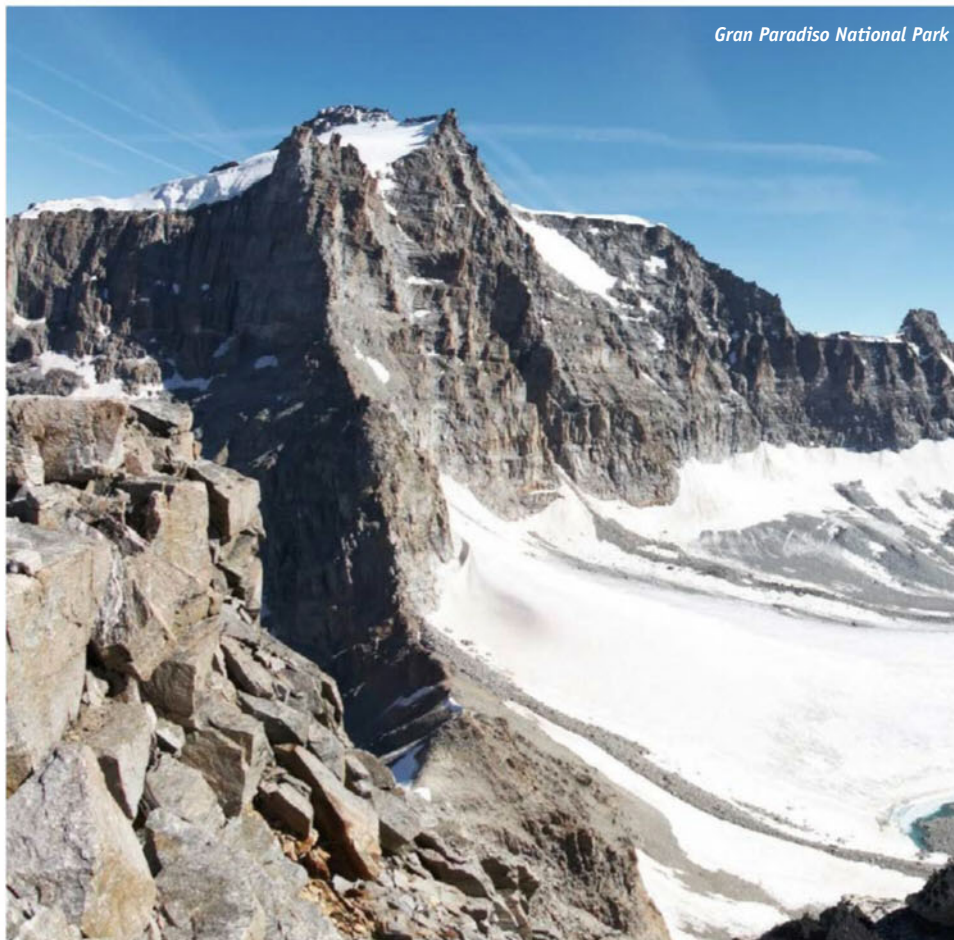
LAKES MAGGIORE & ORTA

③ A region of great geographical contrasts, Piedmont also boasts two lakes. Lake Maggiore runs along the regional border between Piedmont and Lombardy, while the much smaller Lake Orta is entirely contained within Piedmont's boundaries. Maggiore's western shoreline, which includes the resort of Stresa, is considered one of the most beautiful lake areas in Italy. Its mild climate makes it a popular holiday destination with elegant towns of lakeside villas set against a backdrop of snowcapped mountains. The picturesque Borromean Islands have been owned by the Borromeo family since the 15th century. The lake's most famous island is Isola Bella, on which stands a magnificent 17th-century baroque *palazzo*.

The lakes of Piedmont



Lake Orta, a mere 13km long and 1km wide, lies in the western Alpine foothills. Less well known than Lake Maggiore, it is far quieter than its larger neighbour and well worth a visit. The jewel in its crown is the exquisite medieval lakeside town of Orta San Giulio, while further inland you'll find the Sacro Monte nature reserve. This is notable for the 20 small chapels containing extraordinarily lifelike tableaux from the life of St Francis.



Gran Paradiso National Park

THE SOUTH, ALBA & ASTI

④ Southern Piedmont is the rich agricultural powerhouse of Italy. The province of Cuneo lies here between the Alps, the source of the River Po and the low hills known as Le Langhe. Rice is cultivated in the paddy fields on the fertile plains and, unsurprisingly, risotto is a favoured local speciality.

Further south, the hills of Le Langhe that rise above the flat valley provide micro-climates that have been used to cultivate the fruit of the vine for more than 2,000 years. The fine wines produced in the area, notably the Nebbiolo-based Barolo and Barbaresco, are renowned throughout the world.

The fortified hill towns scattered here are evidence of the region's turbulent past, with castles dotted along the skyline. The area is a

paradise for foodies with locally produced delights in every town and excellent restaurants ranging from the simple *trattoria* to Michelin-starred elegance.

Cuneo and Bra merit the visitor's attention while one of the most famous towns is Alba, home of the celebrated white truffle. The annual truffle festival runs for five weeks every autumn, where these precious *funghi* change hands for extraordinary amounts of money.

Travelling north from Le Langhe to the Monferrato hills, the elegant city of Asti is also a haven for gastronomes. Its eponymous sparkling wine might be the first thing that comes to mind, but the city itself has more to offer, with a well-preserved *centro storico* and a *palio* which is older than that of Siena by more than 400 years and takes place every September.





CASTELLETTO TICINO, LAKE MAGGIORE

Type of property **Villa**

Number of bedrooms **3, plus 2 in separate annexe**

Price **€1,600,000**

Location **Castelletto Ticino, Lake Maggiore**

Contact **Sallitalia Properties**

info@sallitaliaproperties.com

☎ 0773 893 7335 www.sallitaliaproperties.com

Facing directly onto the lake an exclusive villa situated within a park of 12,000sqm, with privacy and tranquility being its two principal characteristics. The villa was constructed at the end of the 8th century and internally offers 600sqm of accommodation over four levels. Adjacent to the villa is an annexe for guests. Surrounding the property there are magnificent terraces and porticos. To further complement this fine villa there is a boat house, garage and excellent grounds/gardens.



STRESA

Type of property **Apartment**

Number of bedrooms **1**

Price **€135,000**

Location **Brisino, Stresa**

Contact **Sallitalia Properties**

info@sallitaliaproperties.com

☎ 0773 893 7335 www.sallitaliaproperties.com

Situated in Brisino, a suburb of Stresa, this apartment enjoys a lake view and is located within a residence with swimming pool and tennis courts. Internally the centrally heated apartment offers 60sqm of accommodation which comprises: living room, bedroom, bathroom and terrace. Externally there is also parking. Energy rating: C.



San Remo, on the sophisticated Italian Riviera

One such network is the 'Milky Way' west of Turin, where numerous attractive and well-equipped resorts together provide about 400km of great slopes all within easy reach of each other. Another extensive network is the 'Dolomiti Superski' area where, across twelve different mini-areas, 450 lifts serve a whopping 1,220km of slopes. The tiny, unspoilt region of Valle d'Aosta, meanwhile, is another spot teeming with ski resorts.

for property, while the eastern half can have steeply dramatic terrain and a more exclusive air. One-bedroom apartments in prime sites on the coast can ask €200,000, but venture a few miles into the charming hilly hinterland behind it and you might pay the same for a detached two-bedroom house.

The Veneto and its neighbour, FVG, both have appealingly flat and expansive coastlines, variously broken up by shallow lagoons and

Liguria 'the Italian Riviera' has a coastal climate and an elegant, cosmopolitan air

BESIDE THE SEASIDE

If you're more interested in the blue stuff than the white stuff, northern Italy also has some wonderful areas for coastal properties, of course. Chief of these would be the France-abutting 'Italian Riviera', a.k.a. Liguria, plus the seaside parts of the Veneto and its delightful neighbouring region, Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

Liguria has a sublime coastal climate and an elegant, cosmopolitan air. It's been attracting foreign buyers for hundreds of years. Generally, the western half of its coastline is flatter, warmer, and less expensive

wide sandy strands. Property within a reasonable distance of Venice is always going to be more expensive, but there are plenty of affordable options further along the coast.

Feel spoilt for choice? Yes, northern Italy can do that to you. ■

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Clockwise from top left: Artichoke seller at the market; frescoes can be found exposed in the many rock churches; the abandoned area of the Sassi; cats at night; new churches were built when Matera became capital of Basilicata; all buildings are built into, and from, the same rock; fish stall at the market, vehicle outside bar Area 8





48 HOURS IN...

Matera

Sally FitzGerald takes a trip to Basilicata to explore the picture perfect area of Matera and its increasingly famous Sassi – just before the tourist hordes arrive...

In Matera there is a saying that the living always stay beneath the dead.” As our local tour guide Antonio utters these words I suddenly realise that the heavily cratered surface we are standing on – that I had mistaken for volcanic rock just moments earlier – is in fact a graveyard. The indentations of tombs that were dug out of the rock centuries ago and have been worn away by the feet of generations surround us. But this is no ordinary graveyard: it is also the roof of the next layer of cave houses beneath us.

Italy is littered with picturesque hilltop villages, but you will rarely experience anything quite like Matera. Located in southern Italy’s Basilicata region, between the country’s heel and toe, Matera is something of a phenomenon. Not only is it one of the oldest continually inhabited settlements in the world, with the first residents taking root in the Palaeolithic times, but, unlike many hilltop towns which are built onto the rock, Matera is built into it. Its history has literally been carved in stone.

Today Matera is made up of several small districts, the oldest being the Sassi, ‘the Stones’ or ‘Rocks’. Seen from above, the two Sassi – Sasso Caveoso and Sasso Barisano – join to form the wings of a dove. The Byzantine monks were the first to properly start building here, which is one of the reasons why Matera now boasts more than 150 rock churches! But the city really came into its own in 1663 when Matera was made capital of Basilicata. The area of town at the top of the hill was completely renovated with ornate façades, while new palaces ➤



WHAT TO SEE AND DO

CASA NOHA ❶

Recinto Cavone, 9

www.fondoambiente.it

Learn the fascinating story of Matera in this old cave house converted into a museum. The Fodale and Latorre families donated Casa Noha to FAI (the Italian equivalent of the National Trust) so the building wouldn't go to ruin but would be faithfully preserved as a living memory of those who have lived within its rooms. Matera's history is now told through videos in three rooms – a poignant way to learn more about this city's tumultuous history. Although there is no entry fee, a donation of €4 is suggested.

THE CRYPT OF THE ORIGINAL SIN ❷

www.criptadelpeccatooriginale.it

Around 10km from Matera, the rock church often referred to as the Sistine Chapel of Rock Art is a real must-visit. A tour must be pre-booked and you will arrange to meet the guide at the Grifo Gas petrol station on the SS7. The painters responsible for the frescoes are fondly known as 'the flower painters of Matera' thanks to the blossoms that link the biblical scenes and saints painted onto the rock, and ancient preservation methods and sympathetic restoration mean that the colours in the paintings are nearly as impressive today as they would have been when they were created. Entrance fee €8.

MURGIA TIMONE ❸

Look out over the ravine from the Sassi and you will marvel at the primitive caves on the hillside of Murgia Timone, which were often used by shepherds tending their flocks. Cross over the ravine into the natural park and you can explore the caves on foot, marvel at fauna and flora, and get the chance to take the postcard-perfect photo of the Sassi. Offering different plants throughout the year, this is a great place to visit in any season. It is also one of the locations used to film the new *Ben-Hur* movie.

TAKE A TOUR ❹

With Sassi's streets all looking fairly similar, avoid getting lost and get the best from a short visit to Matera by booking a guide. I had tours with two different guides, both of whom I would thoroughly recommend. Antonio Manicone was born in the Matera area and speaks impeccable English – find him at www.materatourguide.it. If you'd like to take a themed tour of Matera, eg, a culinary trip, or you'd prefer to take in the sights by bike, get in touch with Dora Capiello at www.ferulaviaggi.it



Panoramic view of the Sassi

DON'T MISS

BEN-HUR

Following on from its starring role in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, Matera has been chosen as a film set once again, this time in the remake of the epic *Ben-Hur*. Stars Jack Huston, Morgan Freeman and Toby Kebbell could be found wandering the streets of Matera earlier on in the year. The film is set for release in March 2016.

and government headquarters were constructed from the beautiful creamy mix of sandstone and limestone. With new places of worship being developed, the older rock churches further down the hill were turned into more basic dwellings. So the rich lived at the top of the hill and the poorer further down, a system which worked well for a while.

But at the time of the French Revolution Matera lost its position as capital of Basilicata and with its

the infant death rate was high. And this continued until the 1950s.

It was then that a government investigation uncovered the true state of Matera's slums and, as word of the conditions spread, TV crews flocked to the area. Matera soon became known as 'the shame of Italy' and the slums were declared uninhabitable. New districts had to be built on the edges of the Sassi to rehouse everyone from the slums, and most of the Sassi were left abandoned.

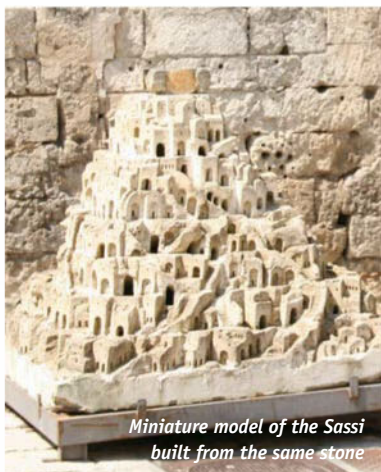
Families lived in one-roomed cave 'houses', with the animals sleeping at the back

decline in status followed its residents' living conditions. The areas where the poorer classes lived soon became slums. There was no sewer system or running water here. Families lived in one-roomed cave 'houses', with the animals sleeping at the back and the adults and children at the front. There was only one window in each rock house, so families would have to sleep with the doors open, even in the harshest winter. Malaria was rife and

Walking the cobbled streets today there is still an element of a ghost town about the Sassi. In certain areas, wire fencing covered windows hint at the scenes of happiness and sorrow that have played out within, while silence echoes around courtyards that would once have been filled with children. But there are also many signs of the renovation plan that is taking place to restore the Sassi to their former glory. Rows of one-room



The Casa Noha video rooms



Miniature model of the Sassi built from the same stone



The Palombaro water system

houses are now being sympathetically combined and restored to create bigger, modern homes, and much of the top half of the Sassi is thriving and lived in once again. As we wander the narrow walkways we see some of the new homes, the residents sat outside with makeshift stalls selling miniature versions of Matera that have been carved from the stone, hopeful to attract a few passing tourists. Prices are incredibly cheap yet stocks are still high, which is unsurprising as in the last five minutes we have seen but a handful of other tourists – the joy of early season Matera. There is only one main road running through the town, so even the roar of cars is non-existent.

Our next stop is the church of Santa Lucia alle Malve, one of the many former rock churches. Built in the 9th century by the Benedictine monks, it was later converted into a residential building, signs of both uses still apparent in the stone. Crosses remain carved into the rock, while the ceiling is domed to echo the appearance of a traditional church. But it is the frescoes that catch my eye. Between patches of green algae covered stone lie several perfect

depictions of saints, including one which had another fresco painted directly on top, but the face of the latter fell off to reveal the much finer painting beneath. The art has been left as a merging of the two.

From here we make our way back to the main square, Piazza Vittorio Veneto, to go deeper underground in *Il Palombaro Lungo*, the city's water system. Built in the first half of the 19th century, the system was excavated 15 metres into the rock, is fed by rain water and stretches from the square to the castle. Today you can only explore a small part of the system via specially constructed metal walkways, but the sheer size of the construction is enough to leave you in awe. The high ceilings make you wonder how exactly they managed to carve out this five million litre cistern, while the eerie lighting sets my imagination going, ready to spot the Italian equivalent of the Phantom of the Opera sailing around the corner. It's no wonder this incredible construction helped Matera to achieve UNESCO World Heritage status in 1993.

As early evening approaches and we emerge back into the daylight, ➤

WHERE TO STAY

HILTON GARDEN INN 5

Via Germania, Borgo Venusio

☎ +39 0835 215111

<http://hiltongardeninn3.hilton.com>

This hotel is about a 15-minute drive from the Sassi, located in the countryside of Matera, so a car is recommended if you stay here. The hotel itself is well equipped and elegantly decorated, with the 360 degree glass lifts giving a great view of the surrounding countryside. Take a well deserved rest in the hotel spa after hours of exploring the city, and enjoy a good breakfast in the restaurant before you set off again the next day. The food here is good too, if you'd prefer to have an evening meal in the restaurant rather than heading back into the Sassi. Everything you'd expect from a trusted Hilton brand.

L'HOTEL IN PIETRA 6

Via San Giovanni Vecchio, 22

☎ +39 0835 344040

www.hotelinpietra.it

This boutique hotel in the Sassi is housed in an old church, with the building dating back to 1300. With only seven rooms and two suites you need to book early, but each exudes character and style. Beautifully renovated in 2008, if you like the idea of staying in one of the old cave dwellings, but also enjoy a touch of luxury, this is the choice for you! The suite offers a two-storey room with bathtub built into the stone and rain shower on the ground floor, plus king-size bed on the first floor, while the more basic room has a bed carved into the stone framework and panoramic views of the city. There's something to suit most budgets.

SEXTANTO LE GROTTA DELLA CIVITA 7

Via Civita, 28

☎ +39 0835 332744

www.sextantio.it

The perfect choice for a romantic getaway in Matera, this cave hotel promises a stay you'll never forget. Cave rooms are designed to give you the experience of staying in a cave, but with all the modern comforts we all desire – in particular a good bath! Lighting is kept to a minimum to add to the atmosphere, with candles providing a romantic glow at night. A generous buffet breakfast is served in the picturesque chapel, and the staff are friendly and very helpful. Fantastic views make this a wonderful choice for the full Matera experience.

DON'T MISS

CAPITAL OF CULTURE
Matera has been picked as one of Europe's Capitals of Culture in 2019, along with Plovdiv, Bulgaria. It is the perfect chance for the town to show how times have changed since it was called 'the shame of Italy' in the 1950s, and for Matera to promote its rich history, beautiful scenery and diverse culture. www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en

INFORMATION

➤ To find out more about Matera and the surrounding area, visit www.mappingbasilicata.it

WHERE TO EAT

OI MARI 8

Via Fiorentini, 66

www.oimari.it

Oi Mari is a real favourite with the locals, and once you've eaten here you'll understand why. A pizzeria in a lovely cave setting, the pizza is just as good as you'd expect, but the rest of the menu is worth exploring too! We enjoyed a delicious Italian version of fish and chips, with battered salt cod and sun-dried red pepper 'crisps', artichoke croquettes, and thin fried potatoes with ham, onion relish and reduced wine drizzle. The desserts are to be recommended too! Thoroughly recommended.

€

BACCANTI RISTORANTE 9

Via Sant'Angelo, 58-61

☎ +39 0835 333704

www.baccantiristorante.com

Elegant dishes created from local ingredients are order of the day at Baccanti Ristorante. If you like contemporary twists on regional classics, you're spoilt for choice, with dishes ranging from homemade *tortelloni* stuffed with ricotta and artichokes to sausage and mushroom risotto and slow-cooked veal cheeks. Locals claim that Italian sausages actually originated from this region, so they're definitely worth a try!

€ €

RISTORANTE DA FRANCESCA 10

Vico Bruno Buozzi, 9

☎ +39 0835 310443

www.ristorantefrancescasassi.com

If you're looking for a full-on feast, this is your restaurant. Sample local cheeses, salamis and antipasti in hearty quantities, followed by delicious pasta dishes such as *orecchiette* with bean purée. A good choice of wines are available to choose from, and the busy atmosphere in this cave restaurant makes for a very enjoyable dining experience.

€ €

LA CUCINA CASERECCIA STANO 11

Via Santa Cesarea, 67

☎ +39 0835 344101

www.stanoristorazione.it

This family-run restaurant is one of Matera's hidden gems. Opt for the mixed antipasti to try a range of regional specialities, followed by deliciously traditional main courses. All the desserts are homemade, and the family connection gives the whole restaurant a welcoming feeling.

€

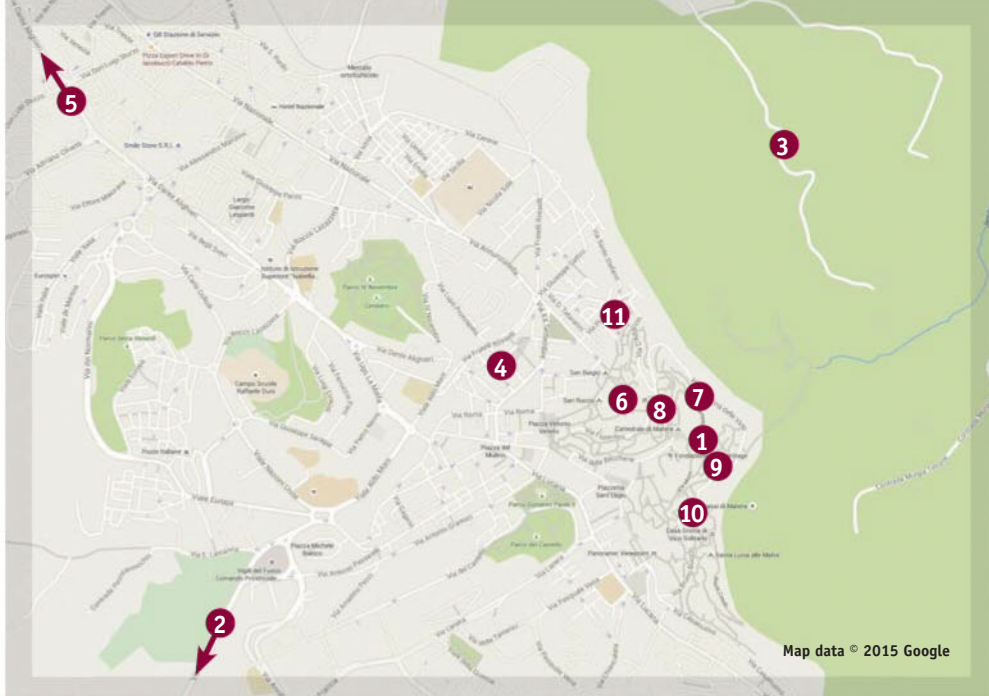
➤ KEY TO RESTAURANT PRICES

(full meal per person, not including wine)

€ Up to €25

€ € €26-€50

€ € € More than €50



DON'T MISS

WRITTEN IN THE STONE

When wandering around Sassi, keep your eyes peeled for interesting shapes in the stone. Thanks to this area being under water at one point, many shells and creatures were calcified into the stone, signs of which can now be found on the street paths and side walls of houses, creating an interesting addition to the stone. We even spotted signs of a sea urchin on one street!

the square has become filled with the old men of Matera, who are more than ready to take willing tourists on a magical mystery tour around the old abandoned streets. Language is no barrier as they use hand signals to point out where they used to live and play, reminiscing about the times they lived in the cave dwellings.

When night descends on the city the atmosphere changes. The streets become even quieter and, as we position ourselves on one of the many balconies to get a panoramic view of the city, lights twinkle across the vista, casting an orange glow over the stone. It feels like part of an elaborate dream as I look at the setting which could be mistaken for Bethlehem. It's magical. I'm only tempted back to reality by the comforting aroma of pizza filtering out from wood fired ovens, inviting us into a nearby cave pizzeria.

The following day we get in the car to explore the many hidden gems just outside Matera. Our first stop is the Crypt of the Original Sin. Located around 15 kilometres from Matera, the crypt is often referred to as the Sistine Chapel of rock art, and is well worth the trek! It was discovered in the 1990s and restored in 2005, and as we are seated on wooden steps stretching the width of the cave we discover why it is so special. Spot lighting reveals some of the earliest examples of medieval art in southern Italy, still incredibly well preserved thanks to early foresight by the monks who painted them, and then coated them with a protective layer of marble.

One of my favourites is the depiction of Adam and Eve that the

crypt is named after. Here, rather than an apple, Eve holds a fig. It is one of just five known depictions of the fig as the fruit of temptation (another being Michelangelo's in the Sistine Chapel), and by far the oldest.

Next we head to the Parco Scultura della Palomba. Here the basin of one of Matera's stone quarries has been transformed into an open-air art gallery filled with sculptures by Antonio Paradiso. Again we are the only visitors as we peruse the dove-themed iron works of art, and I am particularly glad about this when we reach the far end of the quarry, where a state of reverie descends.

In 2009, the port authority of New York and New Jersey invited artists from across the world to submit designs for a sculpture using twisted metal and debris remains from the World Trade Center after the attack on September 11, 2001. Antonio's design, entitled *Global Last Supper*, was picked as a winner, and the sculptor was given 20 tons of twisted metal, steel girders and bars to transport to Italy to create his installation. The only alterations he made to the metal were to cut the pieces to size – the twists, dents and corrosion that appear in each element were created by the heat and impact of the collision, a sobering reminder of what caused each of these marks and a touching tribute to the event that sent ripples across the world.

Our final stop is the Parco della Murgia Materana, a photographer's dream when it comes to capturing the beauty of the Sassi. As we stand on the edge of the hill, looking out over the



Visitors explore Piazza Giovanni Pascoli



The Last Supper sculpture at the Parco Scultura della Palomba

ravine to the streets that we wandered yesterday, it puts into context the scale of Matera, and also how incredibly unique it is.

Matera may have the looks of a movie star, but it also has a very real and at times harrowing past. And this is what gives it so much character. Rather than turning its back on the thousands of abandoned homes and leaving them to fall into disrepair, new life is being breathed into the ghost town. The magic of the Sassi is fragile and it has to be preserved so it can continue to tell its story. And with Matera being awarded the title of European Capital of Culture for 2019, things are only going to improve. But with that comes tourism. So my advice? Go to Matera now. Explore it while you can still feel like you're the first person to discover its charms. Because soon everyone will be talking about this magical area of Italy, and the endless queuing is bound to take the shine off just a little! ■



The Restaurant Oi Mari



The Sassi by night



Even new houses must be sympathetically restored

GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

The nearest airport to Matera is Bari. Ryanair fly to Bari from Dublin and Stansted, BA and easyJet from Gatwick. Matera is a 45-minute drive from Bari airport, but if you're planning to hire a car, check with your hotel about parking as this is limited in the Sassi.

► BY TRAIN

There is a – privately run – train service from Bari to Matera but trains aren't frequent, so if you're hoping to travel by train, check the timetable before you leave home. The journey will take just over an hour. There is a bus service too.

The Gondola

Their elegance remains, even without the former drapes and trappings, as they glide by so silently like black cats

THE GONDOLA IS A BEAUTIFUL OBJECT, historic and artistic. So sleek in their required black, so silent as they glide through the waterways of *La Serenissima*, they are an art form in themselves.

The gondolas boast their first documented mention in the archives as far back as the 11th century. The last person known to have had a private gondola was the fabulous Peggy Guggenheim (who died in 1979). Her gondola garage in her Grand Canal home, Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, is now a wing of the museum, but she used to frequently glide through the canals en route to Harry's Bar for a well earned Bellini.

There are about 450 gondoliers working in Venice today. Each has their own gondola. To buy one new costs on average €50,000. The price differs according to the degree of wood carving that is ordered on the wooden body and there are six layers of varnish to withstand a watery existence with resilience. There are two gondola sheds for their construction in Venice and the building of one gondola takes 45 days with five men working full time on it. The boat should last 30 years.

Once upon a time they weren't all black and there was no limit to what you could construct on them. Indeed, they become emblems of luxury and display for the wealthy. Moreover, sturdy canopies were built on the gondolas, creating a private space where illicit assignations and political intrigue could run riot.

When Venice was a bustling merchant empire of great wealth and elegance, there were ten thousand gondolas in the waterways, which caused highway pile-ups on a daily basis. The congestion, coupled with their ostentation, which had no limit, led to the decision to scale them right back in size and make them a uniform black colour and for them to return



The prow of the gondola has become a symbol of Venice



Other decorations are chosen by the gondolier



Gondoliers control their boats with one oar



There are around 450 gondoliers working in Venice today

to being vehicles of transparency and transport. Their elegance remains however, even without the former drapes and trappings, as they glide by so silently like black cats.

Their masters are born and bred on the water; the gondoliers are apprenticed and then have to pass a difficult exam on knowledge of the waterways and ability to control the gondola in the narrow labyrinth of canals. They expertly control the boat with one oar (not two as is the norm for a one-man boat) and so the gondola is shaped like a banana as well as being longer on one side so that it doesn't go around in circles. The oar works the boat, held in place by a *forcola* made out of walnut wood. This hand-like apparatus is actually designed personally for each gondolier. Its height and exact shape will be determined by the height and rowing style of the gondolier. The *forcola* is detached each evening and taken home with the owner, as they are expensive and, when left on the gondola, are often stolen. There is one workshop in the area of Cannaregio where these are carved.

At the prow there is a shining metal addition like a crown. The six prongs on one side are said to represent the six *sestieri* (neighbourhoods) of the city and the twirly smaller prongs between them represent the three main lagoon islands – Burano, Murano and Torcello. The opposing prong represents the Giudecca.

The shape at the top represents the Doge's cap and the elegant curved line down the prow represents the Grand Canal. All gondolas have this decoration, but other decoration on the gondola is chosen by the individual gondolier. This decoration at the prow of the gondola has become a symbol, not only of the gondola, but of Venice herself. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER

FREYA MIDDLETON is a private tour guide and writer who lives in Florence, Tuscany. You can read her blog online or learn more about her tours at www.freyasflorence.com

Photography © Freya Middleton



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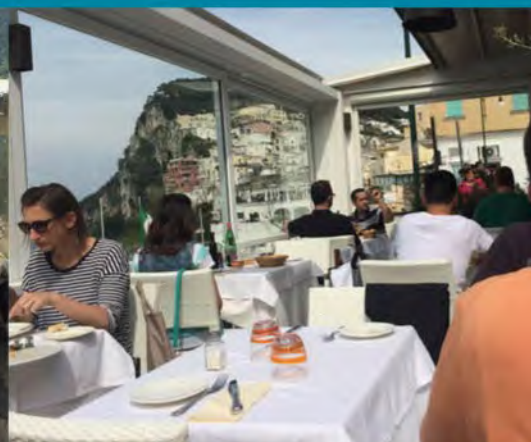
Image © Palazzo Murat, Positano

Gourmet Guide to Amalfi

The Amalfi Coast is known for its high cliffs, perilous roads, stunning views – and fantastic seafood. **Laura McLean** takes a five-day gourmet trip to discover the finest food in the best locations...



Photography © Laura McLean unless otherwise stated



GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

The nearest airport is Naples, which is about 60-90 minutes' drive away from Sorrento and Amalfi. Between them, BA, easyJet, Thomson, Monarch and Meridiana offer flights from most major UK airports.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

GROUP TOUR OF CAPRI AND ANACAPRI

www.acamporatravel.it

A group tour of Capri and Anacapri from Sorrento: full day, £62 per person.

GROUP TOUR OF POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM

www.acamporatravel.it

A group tour of Pompeii and Herculaneum from Sorrento: full day, £46 per person – or £90 per person to go with a smaller group and have lunch included. The wine tasting at the vineyard where they make the Lacryma Christi Del Vesuvio wines, and olive oil can be booked locally through Acampora Travel.

IL GUSTO DELLA COSTA LIMONCELLO FACTORY

www.sunland.it

www.ilgustodellacosta.it

A visit to the Gusto Della Costa limoncello factory can be arranged locally through Sunland, or via the factory directly.

VISIT THE TOWNS ON THE ROUTE

The following tour option to visit the towns on the route is also available for Citalia customers to book as perhaps a more realistic alternative to having a private driver the whole time. Amalfi Drive from Sorrento: full day, £30 per person. Amalfi Drive Select from Sorrento with a smaller group, including lunch: full day, £92 per person.



Trio of desserts at the Grand Royal Hotel

DAY 1: ARRIVING AT SORRENTO

We spend our journey from Naples Airport to Sorrento white-knuckled as our driver whizzes us through a tangle of villages and coastal roads while stunning scenery flashes by.

We arrive at **The Grand Royal Hotel**, a charming lodge resting right on the cliff overlooking Sorrento's port, offering fantastic views of the stunning Mount Vesuvius looming majestically over the Bay of Naples.

We start the afternoon with lunch at Sorrento's famous **Fauno Bar**. Situated right in the centre of Piazza Tasso, Sorrento's main square, Fauno Bar offers a fantastic location to sit and watch the world go by.

Alfonzo, Fauno Bar's owner, greets us as he instructs his doting staff and welcomes us to Sorrento. We start with the house white, a Sannio Falanghina, fresh and sweet – perfect for a warm afternoon.

I order the *spaghetti frutti di mare* as I'm on a mission to try as much of the local seafood as humanly possible, and this dish does not disappoint! Clams, mussels, prawns and scallops combine with fresh cherry tomatoes and a splash of wine to create a rich, flavoursome sauce – I am in food heaven. We finish with an *affogato* and set off to explore Sorrento.

Becky, Citalia's Neapolitan Riviera Manager, walks us through the main square and into the labyrinth of back streets of the old town, known as "the drains". Here you will find handcrafted leather sandals and bags, gallons of limoncello, fresh fruit and vegetables, linens and cottons, scarves and ceramics.

Smells of incense waft from the churches and beautiful flowers line every street – the people of Sorrento

take pride in their gardens, even if said garden is composed of just a few pots on a balcony.

We retire to our hotel, which hosts our first evening meal – we are still full from our lunch but delicious smells come through to Reception, tempting us towards the restaurant to feast. We order the tasting menu, which really gives you insight into Amalfi Coast food. Course one consists of garlic baked until it's buttery, soft and spreadable, fresh bread, tomato salsa and creamed potato with lemon and prawns.

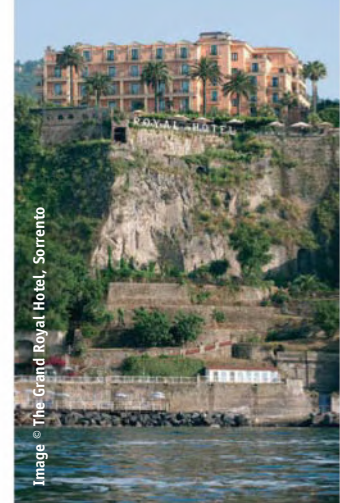
We then move on to a salad, with a soft and tender raw scallop delicately presented with filo shavings and pansy petals, then drizzled with a strawberry vinaigrette. The delightful langoustine is topped with a pesto herb crust and a roasted tomato balancing the flavours perfectly.

My favourite dish is the ravioli served in a little wonton steamer, filled with creamed, zesty potato – it's like gnocchi elegantly wrapped in wafer-thin pasta. We then have a little taster of shrimp spaghetti twirled around a fork. The sweetness of the shrimp perfectly cuts through the salty sauce and is complemented by acidic tomato. We then taste fillet of salmon and a warm salad of finely chopped lettuce and red cabbage, dressed with soy sauce.

We finish with a trio of desserts: rum baba dripping with boozy goodness, a light and creamy lemon delice and a cheesecake composed of panna cotta, large fresh strawberries and a sweet and fruity compote.

Spanning three hours, the meal is leisurely and enjoyable. The waiting staff cannot do enough for us and ensure our glasses are always topped up with wines that accompany our courses beautifully.

Cliff-top accommodation in Sorrento



Spaghetti at the Fauno





Capri cake



The Green Grotto



Monte Solaro



Da Gigino



The Caprese salad takes pride of place

DAY 2: A DAY ON CAPRI

We take the 9.50am jetfoil over to Capri for a guided tour of this beautiful idyll island. Capri is famed for its luxurious boutiques, celebrity callers, rugged coastlines, cool cafés and its breathtaking Blue Grotto. Capri is a tourist haven and we want to discover some of its charm.

We pass the Welcome Statue waving as we start our boat tour of Capri. First we come across the Coral Grotto where, just below sea level, we admire bright orange coral flourishing on the rocks. We then visit the Grotta Bianca, where a stalagmite has grown into a statue of Madonna, watching over us from overhead. The captain of our boat makes sure we get a fantastic view by reversing right into every grotto we come across so that we can see high up into the caves. We then whizz round to the *I Faraglioni* – three spurs of rock rising up out of the sea. Faraglione di Mezzo is big enough to pass through in a small boat, and that's exactly what we do. A buzz of excitement fills the boat as we approach this marvelous rock, our guide tells us to kiss a loved one as we pass through for good luck!

The Green Grotto produces stunning green hues in the water, due to the way the light from a submarine cave reflects against the rocks above. Grotta Verde is one of the longest caves on the island and is ten metres deep.

We pass the Punta Carena lighthouse hovering over the south of Capri before approaching the Grotta Azzurra (Blue Grotto). Here you can hop aboard a wooden rowing boat and be taken through one of the most enchanting caves in the world. Mind your head as you enter a very small passage into the grotto, where you will be welcomed by the sound of traditional Italian song and crystal blue water. It is said that Emperor Tiberius used the grotto as his swimming pool when he retired to the island in 27AD.

We disembark at Capri Harbour and head for Anacapri, slowly spiralling around the island's mountainous roads and tiny villages. We reach Anacapri and, after a quick espresso and sample of Capri cake, we head for the chairlift to take us up to the summit of Monte Solaro, 589 metres above sea level. As we take a tranquil ride up to the summit, we look below to see locals tending their gardens.

We hastily hop off the chairlift, climb the ancient stairs and discover the peaceful lookout where you can sit and admire one of Italy's most stunning coastlines. Anacapri offers sensational views out to sea.

We head back down for lunch in Capri Town. It's not a trip to Capri without a Caprese salad, each is presented in its own individual way and is utterly delicious.

We head to the main square of Capri Town, packed with designer shops, bakeries and perfume boutiques. We work our way through the streets to reach the stunning Augustus Gardens, offering yet more beauty spots and photo opportunities.

Back in Sorrento we freshen up and enjoy an Aperol spritz at sunset before heading out for our evening meal. Tonight we dine at **Da Gigino**, located in the historical centre of Sorrento. Da Gigino is a traditional pizzeria with a woodburning oven offering some of the best pizzas you'll find in town. We order a selection, though the Pizza Gigino is a unanimous favourite, topped with tomato, fresh buffalo mozzarella, salami, olives and ham.

It's not a trip to Capri without a Caprese salad, each presented in its own individual way...

WHERE TO STAY

MULTI-CENTRE BREAK WITH CITALIA

☎ 01293 731753

www.citalia.com



Citalia, the leading Italian specialist, has a five-night multi-centre break to Sorrento and Amalfi from £879 per person, based on two sharing. This price includes three nights at the Grand Hotel Royal in Sorrento, followed by two nights at the Hotel Santa Caterina in Amalfi, both on a B&B basis. Also included is a 10 per cent discount at Parrucchiano Restaurant in Sorrento, a guaranteed room upgrade at Santa Caterina, a €30 shopping credit in the hotel's boutique, private transfers throughout the trip, and return flights from London Gatwick with British Airways. Based on departures on 21 October 2015.

GRAND HOTEL ROYAL

Via Correale, 42 – Sorrento

☎ +39 081 807 3434

www.citalia.com/hotel/S16

Just around the corner from Museo Correale di Terranova, a few minutes' walk from the centre of Sorrento, the 4-star Grand Hotel Royal has a commanding position on the cliff with wonderful views of the Bay of Naples and Mount Vesuvius.

PALAZZO MURAT HOTEL

Via dei Mulini, 23 – Positano

☎ +39 089 875177

www.citalia.com/hotel/119133

The charming 4-star Palazzo Murat is situated in a pedestrianised area in the heart of Positano.

HOTEL SANTA CATERINA

Via Mauro Comite, 9 – Amalfi

☎ +39 089 871012

www.citalia.com/hotel/A15

Perched high on a clifftop amidst scented lemon and orange groves, the prestigious 5-star Hotel Santa Caterina enjoys an exceptional position with breathtaking, uninterrupted views out to sea.



DAY 3: TO HERCULANEUM

Our third day takes us to **Herculaneum**. Hidden by ash and rock during 79AD's eruption of Vesuvius, Herculaneum remained undiscovered until 1739 and it wasn't until 1927 when full archaeological excavation began and Herculaneum truly came to light. Unlike Pompeii, Herculaneum is only about one third excavated at present.

We take a walk through time and explore the many shops, villas, homes, stables and offices of those who walked these streets centuries ago. The amazing thing about Herculaneum is the realization of how advanced civilisation was and the complex systems these people used for building, preserving water and day-to-day living.

Incorporated into this trip was a visit to a vineyard where we had a light lunch and tasted several local wines, including Lacryma Christi Del Vesuvio, the "Tears of Christ".

This evening we head to the **Antica Trattoria** in the heart of Sorrento, for what has to be the greatest meal I've ever had. We want to try everything and owner Aldo and his team of charming waiters are more than happy to entertain. Aldo has owned the restaurant for 30 years and it has been in his family since 1930.

We are guided to the beautiful terrace and offered a cool and crisp glass of prosecco served with local breads and olives to whet the appetite before we embark on a mammoth meal of culinary delights. Our *primo* is a savoury profiterole bursting with leeks and ricotta and topped with a creamy white sauce, followed by one of the Antica Trattoria's speciality dishes: courgette flower stuffed with ricotta and ham, fried in tempura and perched on top of a caramelized onion ring in red wine vinegar.

We then begin the fish courses, starting with *palamita* marinated in Sorrento oranges and lemons, fennel, yoghurt mousse and passion fruit, served with celery sorbet.

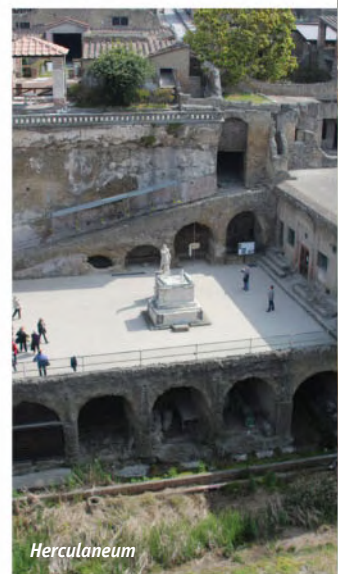
Next is tuna, wrapped in sesame seeds, on an onion sauce, with cuttlefish ink. At this point, head waiter Tony sings to us as Aldo and his son Luca pour us more wine. This is a dining experience second to none.

We then try the *calamari*, which is soft and smooth, flavoured with zesty orange and lemon and texturized with pistachio. We then have a breaded prawn dish with a sardine sauce before moving on to creamed peas with a quenelle of ricotta flavoured with Sorrento lemons.

The following dish instantly becomes my favourite, and is the restaurant's speciality. *Tagliolini Pasta Antica Trattoria* is pasta with prawns and lumpfish in a cream and lemon sauce with spinach, presented in a hollowed out lemon. For a region blessed with such beautiful fruit it's wonderful to see that they have not only perfected their recipes, but also that nothing goes to waste.

After the langoustine and asparagus risotto, we take a break with some lemon sorbet and begin to feel the bloat of this fabulous meal. There's one more savoury course to come before dessert, and it does not disappoint. Fillet of sea bass served with mille-feuille of aubergine and a tomato, potato and courgette croquette shaped like a pear. This course is presented beautifully and tastes delightful.

Out comes the *semifreddo*: chocolate, coffee and hazelnuts – and it's light and sweet and exquisite – followed by a white panna cotta with lime, almonds and passionfruit jelly, topped with a caramel brittle. A grand finale to a wonderful meal.



Herculaneum



Tears of Christ wine



The chefs at La Antica Trattoria



Courgette flower tempura



La Antica Trattoria



Palamita



Prawn and lumpfish tagliolini



Langoustine and asparagus risotto



Panna cotta

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

FAUNO BAR

Piazza Tasso, 13/15 – Sorrento

www.faunobar.it

Relax with a drink or a meal with friends at the famous Fauno Bar in the main square of Sorrento.

€ €

GRAND HOTEL ROYAL – RESTAURANT LE RELAIS & GLICINI ROOM

Via Correale, 42 – Sorrento

☎ +39 081 807 3434

www.royalsorrento.com/en/restaurant-le-relais-glicini-room.php

A charming boutique style restaurant offering both modern and traditional Sorrento cuisine.

€ € €

RISTORANTE AL CAPRI

Via Roma, 38 – Capri

☎ +39 081 837 7108

info@ristorantealcapri.it

www.ristorantealcapri.it

Classic yet contemporary, offering a wide selection of fish dishes and fantastic views over Capri Harbour.

€ € €

L'ANTICA TRATTORIA

Via Padre Reginaldo Giuliani, 33 – Sorrento

www.lanticatrattoria.com

Nestled in the back streets of Sorrento, enjoy the garden terrace and fantastic Sorrento food.

€ € €

DA GIGINO

Via Degli Archi, 15 – Sorrento

☎ +39 081 878 1927

info@dagigino.com

www.dagigino.com

A classic pizzeria in the heart of Sorrento offering traditional pizza baked in a wood burning oven.

€ €

RESTAURANT SANTA CATERINA

Via Mauro Comite, 9 – Amalfi

☎ +39 089 871012

www.hotelsantacaterina.it

Stunning desserts as well as traditional Amalfi cuisine.

€ € €

TRATTORIA DA GEMMA

Via Fra Gerardo Sasso, 11 – Amalfi

☎ +39 089 871345

info@trattoriadagemma.com

www.trattoriadagemma.com

A hidden 'Gem' tucked into Amalfi's busy main square.

€ €



Octopus at the Palazzo



The Palazzo's seafood salad



The terrace at the Palazzo



Main courses at the Palazzo



Laura with Valentino at il Gusto della Costa



The Santa Caterina kitchens



Limoncello from il Gusto della Costa



The Hotel Santa Caterina



Santa Caterina appetizers



Santa Caterina cheesecake

DAY 4: POSITANO, PRAIANO AND AMALFI

Still full from last night's meal we begin our journey along the Amalfi coastal road to our next hotel. The winding road is not for the fainthearted, with steep cliffs on one side and a drop all the way to the sea on the other. Along the way are many lay-bys to stop and admire the spectacular views. The roads get narrower and narrower as we approach Positano and so we all breath in, hoping it will help us fit through the slender streets.

Houses are precariously stacked upon the cliffside and the cobbled streets are tucked away in this endearing town. Above, pergolas dripping with wisteria shade us from the hot sun. We visit the small beach to admire the still, serene water and the towering cliffs overhead.

We head to the charming **Palazzo Murat Hotel** for lunch, where we enjoy an aperitif on the terrace. We start with a selection of salads – warm Caprese style salad with smoked provola cheese, a seafood salad made up of crayfish, prawns and squid, and a

beautiful orange and lemon salad with thinly sliced octopus.

We share a few of the favourites for our main, to get a taste of what the hotel's restaurant has to offer. *Scialatielli* with shrimps and rocket, ravioli with ricotta and mozzarella, topped with tomato and basil sauce, and veal meatballs with gently sautéed broccoli – all the fruit and vegetables used in our meal are grown here in the restaurant garden.

We leave Positano behind us and head for Praiano, to visit a limoncello factory recommended by celebrity chef, Citalia brand ambassador (and my personal hero!), Gennaro Contaldo.

Il Gusta della Costa owner Valentino Esposito explains how he makes his organic limoncello and why it can only be made on the Amalfi Coast. Amalfi lemons are like no other, Valentino explains. "Without quality ingredients, we cannot make quality limoncello," and adds with a cheeky smile, "That's why ours is so good!"

Not only does Il Gusta della Costa supply local restaurants with

limoncello, but also Jamie's Italian restaurants across the UK. Valentino also produces a fine selection of marmalades and jams, from chilli onion to prickly pear.

Full of limoncello, and various other liqueurs offered to us by Valentino, we head to our hotel, the **Hotel Santa Caterina** in Amalfi. This wonderful 5-star hotel has a fresh, modern feel to it, despite being open since 1880. Our evening meal in Hotel Santa Caterina's restaurant is headed by maître'd Pino. We begin with a courgette flower stuffed with ricotta, then ravioli stuffed with aubergine, ricotta and smoked provola cheese, topped with cherry tomato sauce.

Our main is scabbardfish with potato and tomato and garlic croutons, but the climax is dessert. The restaurant's pastry chef, Roberto Ricco, has created a cheesecake with a dark chocolate base to cut through the creamy topping, topped with paper-thin, moulded white chocolate and a brittle tuile. Even if you don't come for dinner, do come for dessert. ➤

As we approach Positano we all breath in, hoping it will help us fit through the slender streets...

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

RESTAURANT "AL PALAZZO"

Palazzo Murat, Via dei Mulini, 23 – Positano

☎ +39 089 875177

www.palazzomurat.it/restaurant-positano

In the centre of Positano, enjoy fine cuisine in a hidden garden surrounded by lemon trees.

€ € €

IL GARDEN

Via Boccaccio, 4 – Ravello

☎ +39 089 857226

info@gardenravello.com

Panoramic views over the Amalfi Coast, high up in Ravello, offering fantastic seafood and pasta dishes as well as local cheeses and cured meats from the mountains.

€ €

KEY TO RESTAURANT PRICES

(full meal per person, not inc. wine)

€ Up to €25

€ € €26-€50

€ € € More than €50

INFORMATION

MULTI-CENTRES WITH CITALIA

Citalia's multi-centre holidays allow holiday makers to easily experience a whole region in one holiday. Some multi-centre trips are bookable via the Citalia website, others are call-to-book, where Citalia's team of travel experts can put together a trip tailor-made to customers' needs and create almost any multi-centre combo that they would like.

CITALIA SECRETS

Citalia prides itself on providing the highest levels of service to customers, both before their holiday and once they arrive. Once they have booked, Citalia provides all its customers with access to its online service, Citalia Secrets, designed to enhance their holiday with great recommendations, from local restaurants and attractions to providing tips on local beauty spots and cultural events. It also provides contact details for our concierge team, who are contactable by telephone or email to help book tours and for any advice or assistance whilst on holiday, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

NEAPOLITAN RIVIERA MANAGER

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Il Garden



Villa Rufolo



Ham and cheese at Il Garden



DAY 5: RAVELLO TO AMALFI

Rainy Ravello. The weather takes a turn for the worst as we head up the turbulent mountains of Ravello in hope of the best views of Amalfi from above. Goosebumps aplenty, we all gasp at every turn in hope a bus won't come around the hairpin bend.

Ravello certainly offers the most stunning views of the Amalfi Coast, as well as enchanting gardens and a buzzing piazza. The town is full of quirky boutiques, handcrafted trinkets and stunning ceramics.

Unfortunately for us, the weather is not on our side for this hilltop paradise and we resort to looking at our guidebooks, imagining the views we are missing. As the heavens open we dive in to **Il Garden** for a light lunch. Luckily, as we tuck in to our cured meats and local cheeses, the sun makes an appearance and we take advantage of the dazzling views.

On the way back down to Amalfi we experience a terrifying ordeal when two coaches try and pass on a corner I'd struggle to get a Fiat Panda through. Our driver guides us through without so much as a nudge to the wing mirror and with a sigh of relief we're back in Amalfi to enjoy the spa offerings and sea-water pool of our hotel.

Our final meal of this wonderful trip is held in the **Trattoria Da Gemma**, where we taste the smoked mozzarella grilled in lemon leaves, fried *pizzetta* and Parma ham, followed by Nonna Gemma's most famous dish: large tube-shaped pasta *alla genovese*. The chunky beef sauce is slowly cooked for several hours and topped with crispy onions. Our final dish in Amalfi is a huge piece of slate with every single dessert from the menu on it. Nonna Gemma knows how to keep food travellers happy. ■

Trattoria Da Gemma



Harvesting Holidays

The olive harvest is something everyone should see at least once. If you have never experienced it yourself now is the time to earn your share of this year's crop...

MIRABILIA

For those who want a fun holiday with a difference – come olive picking with us in beautiful Abruzzo, between the mountains and the sea. We offer luxurious accommodation and full board with delicious meals and unlimited wine. The farmhouse is set in landscaped gardens surrounded by a grove of 1,000 mature olive trees, and has been interior designed to the highest standards. Our guests come from all over the

world to enjoy this celebration of family, festivity and age-old tradition. We take you through the olive harvest from the hand-picking (with nets, ladders and baskets) through to the final process at the olive mill, and you can have your own oil delivered to you back home.

The days in the olive grove are invigorating and always fun, the evenings relaxing and convivial. You need only pick when you want, perhaps

"Olive picking in Abruzzo is a celebration of family, festivity, good food and unfussy wine"

AMANDA PLATELL – DAILY MAIL



preferring some days to explore the beautiful Abruzzan countryside and magical hilltop towns instead. The harvest starts in mid-October and goes through to November. It offers a wonderful week spent learning a traditional skill far from the stresses of our modern way of life.

CONTACT DETAILS

► MIRABILIA
www.mirabilialondra.com
☎ 07901 924568
bookings@mirabilialondra.com

SPIRIT OF OF ITALY TOURS



Harvest Italia 2014, presented by Spirit of Italy Tours, is a 7-night, 8-day tour to Tuscany from October 28 to November 4, open to six people. The tour is centred around the annual olive harvest in the small towns and villages of the Valdarno and

overlook an expansive courtyard and hillsides.

The handpicked Harvest Italia 2014 itinerary includes visits to outdoor markets, a winery tour, cooking demonstration, and more. Guests will enjoy an authentic,

Guests will visit an olive pressing facility and bring home a bottle of oil

Casentino regions, 30 minutes southeast of Florence. The cornerstone of Harvest Italia 2014 is hand-picking olives at Casa Falcioni, a 10-acre property in the charming town of Caviglia with an olive grove of nearly 600 trees. Guests will visit an olive pressing facility and bring home a bottle of olive oil from self-picked olives!

personalized 'slice-of-life experience' during the autumn harvest that they wouldn't be able to cultivate on their own.



CONTACT DETAILS

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www.spiritofitalytours.com
☎ +1 408 318 1980
vicky@spiritofitalytours.com



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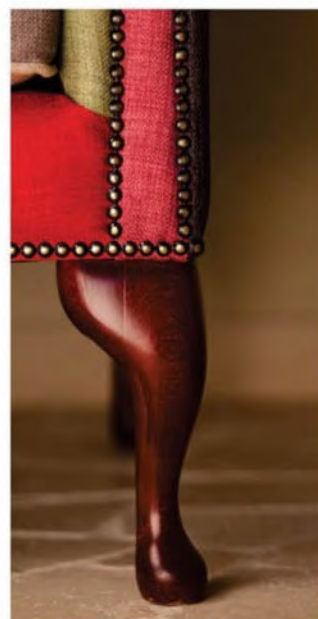
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Price €245,000 Contact Casa Travella Ltd. ☎ 01322 660988
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€200,000-€250,000

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In the green hills of Abruzzo, with sea and mountain views, a detached farmhouse on the outskirts of Corropoli, 12km from the sea at Alba Adriatica, less than an hour from Pescara airport. 400sqm over two floors with lounge, kitchen/dining room, 4 bedrooms, bathrooms, a covered portico on the first floor and large balconies along the front with views over the countryside and down to the sea. Covered garaging below the portico. 1500sqm of fenced garden, and the possibility to purchase further land of about 11,500sqm of which 6,400sqm has building potential for a single or two semi-detached villas.

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www.casatravella.com



€200,000-€250,000

RIPATRANSONE

3 bedroom farmhouse in need of renovation just a few hundred metres from the centre of the mediaeval town of Ripatransone and less than 15km from the beaches at Grottammare, an hour from Pescara and a little more from Ancona airport. 345sqm over 3 floors: Ground floor: Tool storage room and cantina. First floor: Living room, dining room, large kitchen with dining area. Second floor: 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms. 2 large balconies with views, loft area of about 100sqm. 30,000sqm of land, 7,000sqm with 90 olive trees, the remainder agricultural. For either personal use or to provide good rental income or as B&B accommodation.

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€50,000-€100,000

CASA CASSETTA

Casa Cassetta is an adorable 60sqm one-bedroom cottage that's ready to enjoy. And it's available at price – for the whole lot – that some people spend on swimming pools! It's private but not isolated, has great views, easy access and is close to a lively hill town. It can also be expanded, if you'd like, to nearly 100 sqm. You can't beat Casa Cassetta for an inexpensive bolt-hole in Le Marche.

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www.propertyforsalemarche.com



€150,000-€200,000

SAN GINESIO, MACERATA

A simple, comfortable, zero-maintenance, reasonably priced, rustically styled house with 3 bedrooms, spacious kitchen and living room, found in a small hamlet, a *borgo*, where the owners have become part of the local community. It's within easy walking distance of a restaurant and just a 3 minute drive to a bustling town. All for €175,000.

Price €175,000

Contact ☎ +39 347 538 6668

info@propertyforsalemarche.com

www.propertyforsalemarche.com



€50,000-€100,000

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Casa Tre Archi is a 210 sqm, 3 bedroom town house attached to the ancient turrets and entrance arches of the charming medieval town of Petritoli.

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€200,000-€250,000

RESTORED STONE HOUSE

Beautiful stone building in the centre of a medieval town in Garfagnana, Lucca, completely renovated recently. Sunny position, breathtaking view of the valley, facilitated by the large and numerous windows present.

140sqm on three levels: kitchen, dining room, utility room, laundry/boiler room; large living room with fireplace and loft on the kitchen-dining room, study and small bathroom; hallway, two bedrooms and bathroom. Ecological heating powered via Central municipal district heating plant biomass or with wood boiler type inverted flame. Solar panels for water heating. Central gas for domestic use only. Immediately habitable.

Externally there is a small garden, 54 qm and a stone-tiled farmyard.

Price €250,000 Contact ☎ +39 34755 83262 www.houseintuscany.com



€150,000-€200,000

MODERN, RENOVATED APARTMENT

In the area of S. Anna, just a 5 minute walk from Lucca's famous walls, bright large apartment of approx. 120sqm located on the second floor of a building from 1970. Large entrance into a spacious living room with a nice balcony, modern free standing kitchen, connected to the living room with dining area, utility room. Night area: two double bedrooms, one with en suite bathroom and wardrobe room, and a single bed room. Beautiful large modern main bathroom. Private Garage and condominium garden of approximately 200 sqm. Underfloor heating, alarm system, electric shutters. Charges: Stair cleaning €10/month. The rebuilding of the roof with a charge for this apartment of approximately €5,000 is included in the price.

Price €190,000 Contact ☎ +39 34755 83262 www.houseintuscany.com



€50,000-€100,000

LARGE APARTMENT

An elegant, typical Tuscan stone house from 1782, in the heart of a magical village in Garfagnana, not far from Lucca, we offer for sale this interesting large flat, situated in the centre of the village, overlooking the whole valley and with breathtaking viewings from all the windows. The flat has to be renovated / restored, the roof has been already renovated, beautiful antique materials, open on 4 sides, second and last floor. 2 bedrooms. 150sqm surface, 200sqm outdoors.

Price €100,000

Contact ☎ +39 34755 83262

www.houseintuscany.com



€200,000-€250,000

CASA MARIA, PENNA SAN GIOVANNI

Fantastic location in an elevated position on the property's land with views. A delight on an evening to watch the stars and the lights of the surrounding medieval hilltops. The property is being structurally rebuilt using all the original materials partially available from the house as it once stood, so lots of character but also all the security of a well built property. Internal finishings still to be done. Ground floor: kitchen/dining room, living room, two double bedrooms, shower room, storage room. All accommodation on the ground floor has independent access to the outside or into the two loggias. Master suite on the first floor: large double bedroom, studio and bathroom. Water and electricity. 10,000sqm of land.

Price €250,000 Contact ☎ +39 733 667091 rietassociates@gmail.com



€150,000-€200,000

CASA TOSCA, SANT ANGELO IN PONTANO

2 bedroom farmhouse with views of olive trees 5 minutes from the historic village of Sant'Angelo in Pontano. The accommodation will consist of two double bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen/dining room, living room, and outside pergola. The property is approached following a leafy lane just a few minutes from the village in 1 hectare of land. The house is built of local stone and brick, and has been structurally restored to an excellent standard, retaining whenever possible original features and materials. A restored, fully insulated roof with traditional original tiles to the roof and copper guttering and drainage pipes throughout. Internal finishes to be done. Can be completed by us within a 5 month time frame. Price €165,000

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Building the Dream

With the summer holiday season looming, **Jane Smith** and her husband Richard make sure their plumber and electrician have done what preparatory work they can before autumn...



Jane Smith runs an estate agency in Le Marche: www.magicmarche.com. You can contact Jane at: jane@magicmarche.com. Richard runs a restoration management company: www.smithpropertyconsultancy.com. You can contact Richard at: richard@smithprops.com

It was early July and we needed to make good progress this month as our building team would be taking off the whole of August – and who could blame them, as in the last eight months they had taken just two days' holiday at Christmas and three days at Easter.

This month they would concentrate on the internal decorative stone walls: the arches, columns, the fireplace. Their work was beautiful, with each stone being hand-picked for its colour, shape and visual effect. We would have decorative walls in the kitchen, sitting room, hallway, master bedroom and landing. The remainder of the outside of the house was also hand-finished with stones this month and a couple of walls were left as simple plaster finish, to add interest to the overall external appearance.

With the plumber having finished his waste and water pipework, a light screed was laid over every floor in preparation for the underfloor heating system to be laid by him during September.

Now it was the turn of Bruno, our electrician, to start the first phase of his work. His team had the task of putting the carrier tubing and electrical sockets and light switch plates in position throughout the house. The actual wiring would be done as phase 2, scheduled for October. Richard and I had spent eight hours with a floor plan of the house, deciding where all the electrics should go, including the TV and computer points. We made a colour-coded plan (light switches in blue, electrical sockets in green, high level kitchen sockets in

purple, etc) and we gave this to the electricians the day they started. This first phase took three weeks and the noise and dust created by them chasing through the walls was incredible.

Once they had finished, the plasterers started. There were four of them and they arrived complete with their enormous white plaster container, which was parked next to the house and would continuously 'feed' their hand-held machines with plaster. There were two phases to their work: first a rough grey coat was applied to the building blocks, then a fine white top coat was added to neatly finish the walls. The house felt so different afterwards – so much larger, cleaner, brighter.

The final touch from the building team before they left for their holiday, was to build four very beautiful chimney pots. I had photographed many chimneys in the preceding month, and together we decided on what should be our design. Again, beautiful work.

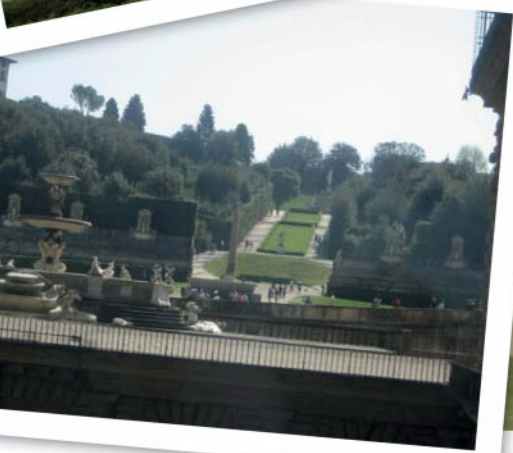
When the building team left for their month holiday we felt truly thrilled with what had been achieved in just eight months since Demolition Day and we felt very fortunate to be working with such a skilled group of people.

'Richard, crack the prosecco!' was my cry. ■



GARDENS OF THE MEDICI

Crossing the River Arno at the Ponte Vecchio, Catherine Sidwell walks south through the Oltrarno to the Pitti Palace to explore the Boboli Gardens, nearly 250 years after they first opened to the public...



The Boboli Gardens survived Napoleon's reign and can be enjoyed today as they were four centuries ago

Above, main image: The view towards the Pitti Palace from the hill behind the Gardens. Inset, from top: The Knight's Garden; view of the main garden's axis from the Pitti Palace

The poet Shelley described Florence in the early 19th-century as a 'Babylon of palaces and gardens'. This was his impression of the city as he saw it from the perspective of the Boboli Gardens, behind the Pitti Palace, on the south side of the river.

Designed in 1549 by Niccolò Pericoli ('Il Tribolo'), for the Medici, this 16th-century park of many gardens inspired the landscape of many European court gardens, even as the changing tastes of subsequent rulers led to additions and alterations. The Boboli Gardens survived Napoleon's reign and can be enjoyed today as they were four centuries ago. They are now regarded as an open-air museum.

Referring to Italian renaissance gardens, Edith Wharton noted in the early 1900s: "Of the period in which the garden began to be a studied architectural extension of the house, few examples are to be found near Florence. The most important, if not the most pleasing,

of Tuscan pleasure-gardens lies, however, within the city walls. This is the Boboli Garden."

I am here to succumb to what Wharton described as "Italian garden magic". I walk south, across the Ponte Vecchio, to the Oltrarno (other side of the Arno) and approach the Pitti Palace.

Luca Pitti continued his father's ambition of 1341, building the Pitti Palace and purchasing further land. Their aim was to secure prestige in the Florentine cultural and political scene. Sadly, this vanity project left debts for Pitti's descendants, and their rivals the Medici purchased the palace and the Orto de' Pitti (Pitti Garden) in 1549. Built to impress, the imposing, austere palace is made of warm golden stone blocks the size of hay bales. Today it resembles the palace of the 17th century.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

The name Boboli is believed to have evolved from the purchase of a garden by Luca Pitti in 1418 that had belonged to the Borgolo family.

The final triangular site stretches from the Forte di Belvedere and hillside in the east, beyond the Pitti Palace all the way to the Porta Romana in the south-west. Thousands of trees, evergreen avenues and open parkland cover 45,000 square metres (some 11 acres).

Formal architectural gardens reveal magnificent views of Florence and the Tuscan hills. Holm oaks form covered archways and provide shade from the sun. A long cypress avenue is punctuated by meandering pathways where labyrinths were once a place for dancing and revelry. Parkland and woodland offer places to relax, play or escape and you can rest overlooking the fountains to reflect.

Clipped foliage provides partial recesses for white stone statues. Encountering classical and mythological subjects in the gardens or one of four grottoes while wandering and daydreaming can transport you back in time. Later additions include a lemon house and delightful Rococo coffee house, built in the 1770s.

CITRUS IN THE BOBOLI GARDENS

Though there is an absence of flowers for enthusiasts of the English country garden, the Boboli Gardens feature an abundance of citrus plants. In 14th-century Florence, bitter orange, citron and lemon plants adorned the gardens of noble families. The beauty of the trees, flowers and fruits, the enjoyment of their fragrance, and the use of citrus were considered a luxury.

Plants were imported from the Middle East and, ultimately, Asia. Bushes of bitter 'Seville' oranges (citrus aurantium) and lemon (citrus limon) arrived in Europe via Sicily and Spain. With careful transportation and cultivation, citrus began to thrive here in Tuscany.

Interest in citrus peaked during the reign of Cosimo III, who followed his father's passion for expanding the Medici's collection with new varieties, including bergamot orange (citrus bergamia) and pomelo (citrus grandis). Scientific developments led to further experimentation and classification of the collection by naturalists into the 19th century. Many varieties are still grown.

Citrus has been grown here since the 14th century

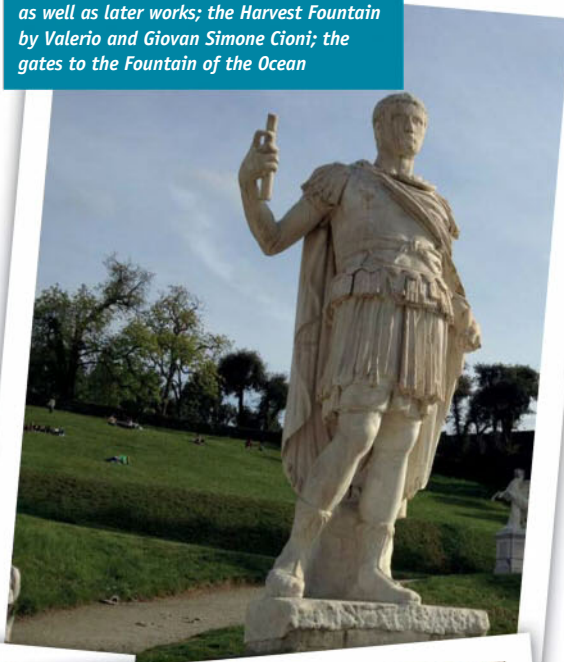


CREATING THE BOBOLI GARDENS

A portrait of Eleanora of Toledo in the Uffizi Gallery intrigued me on my last visit. The marriage of Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, to the immensely wealthy Eleanora in 1539 was a prudent match. Their union enabled the Medici to purchase the Pitti Palace and embark on the creation of the world famous Boboli Gardens, *I Giardini di Boboli*.

The Medici employed 'Il Tribolo', Niccolò Pericoli, to design the initial garden scheme. He used geometry and repeated right angles in his plans. Subsequent rulers purchased further land and changes in 18th- and 19th-century tastes are apparent in the present landscape. ➤

Clockwise from below: The Gardens serve as a museum that includes Roman antiquities as well as later works; the Harvest Fountain by Valerio and Giovan Simone Cioni; the gates to the Fountain of the Ocean



VISTING THE BOBOLI GARDENS

➤ ACCESS

Enter or exit the Boboli Gardens from any of three points: through the Pitti Palace; from beside the 14th-century Roman Gate, *Porta Romana*, in the west (see below); or near the 16th-century Belvedere Fort, *Forto di Belvedere*, to the east.

➤ PORTA ROMANA – THE ROMAN GATE ENTRANCE

The most level access to the Boboli Gardens is from the Roman Gate entrance. A gentle incline passes the Fountain of the Ocean, the Lemon House, several significant statues and the Museum of Costume. Enjoy views across the city just beyond the palace and the amphitheatre. Follow the sloping gravel path beyond the Artichoke Fountain and down the slope to the Grand Grotto before leaving through the Pitti Palace.

➤ POLO MUSEALE FIORENTINO

Pitti Palace and Boboli Gardens, Piazza Pitti, 1

Firenze Musei ☎ +39 055 294883

www.polomuseale.firenze.it

Check seasonal opening days, closed first and last Monday of the month. On-going restoration and maintenance means garden features may not be available and copies of original statues may be displayed. Book tickets to avoid queues. Tickets are reasonably priced and great value.

➤ OTHER MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES AT THE PITTI PALACE

The Palatine Gallery, Modern Art Gallery, Silver Museum, Carriage Museum and Porcelain Museum.

➤ UPCOMING ANNIVERSARIES

2015 marks 250 years since Florence became Italy's capital (1865-1870, after Turin and before Rome). Next year will mark 250 years since the enlightened ruler Pietro Leopoldo I granted public access to the Boboli Gardens. Spend a day here, or visit for a one or two hour break from city sightseeing. There is a café in the Pitti Palace courtyard, or take a packed lunch and sit in the gardens. Visit from spring to autumn, although there are blue skies in winter too. The Pitti Palace houses an art collection second only to the Uffizi.

➤ BARDINI GARDEN

Costa San Giorgio, 2

☎ +39 055 2006 6206

www.bardinipeyron.it

A 'greenway' walk skirts the Belvedere and links the Bardini and Boboli Gardens on the hillside. The more intimate of the two is the Bardini, a park of three gardens recently opened to the public. Its long, terraced Kaffeehaus is a shady place for afternoon tea with views across the city.

WHERE TO EAT AND STAY

➤ GUSTA PIZZA

Via Maggio, 46r

For a quick pizza near the Pitti Palace, try Gusta Pizza. Owned by three brothers, the atmosphere is warm and friendly and their pizzas are amazing.

➤ GELATERIA SANTA TRINITA

Piazza Frescobaldi, 11-12/r

www.gelateriasantatrinita.it

The Gelateria Santa Trinita overlooks the Santa Trinita bridge. You can also buy Tuscan foods and wines to take home.

➤ PORTA ROMANA

GELATERIA YOGURTERIA

Piazzale di Porta Romana, 2

☎ +39 055 221121

Across the road from the Porta Romana, the Porta Romana Gelateria Yogurteria serves tea and coffee too. Sit in the cool white contemporary interior and summon the energy for the return walk through the gardens. (Closed on Mondays.)

➤ ANTICA TORRE HOTEL

Via de' Tornabuoni, 1

☎ +39 055 265 8161

This fabulous hotel is a delight. Located in a medieval tower, its roof terrace provides 360 degree views over Florence, the Arno and the surrounding hills. Ideal for special occasions or a short city stay, it's a few steps from Santa Trinita and the Ponte Santa Trinita in an up-market shopping district. Highly recommended for its location, atmosphere, beautiful bedrooms and marble bathrooms, there is a peaceful breakfast room and bar with indoor and outdoor seating. The breakfast selection is sensational and the lift is an appreciated asset. Friendly international staff help with local information and tips and the visitors' book speaks volumes of praise.

A BRIEF GARDEN TOUR

1 COURTYARD CORTILE

Entering the palace through the tall central doorway, I step into the late 16th-century courtyard designed by Ammannati. Two stone wings in the Mannerist style were built at each side from 1558-1570. Looking up they frame the Artichoke Fountain, *Fontana del Carciofo* (1639-41), by Francesco Susini, adorned with *putti*. The perspective of the view beyond draws the eye to the garden above.

2 AMPHITHEATRE ANFITEATRO

At the top of the curved staircase to the gardens, the view widens to the amphitheatre and hill beyond. To the left is a view of the Duomo to be remembered. I walk into the centre of the arena, past an Egyptian

obelisk, a Roman basin and am surrounded by six tiered stands.

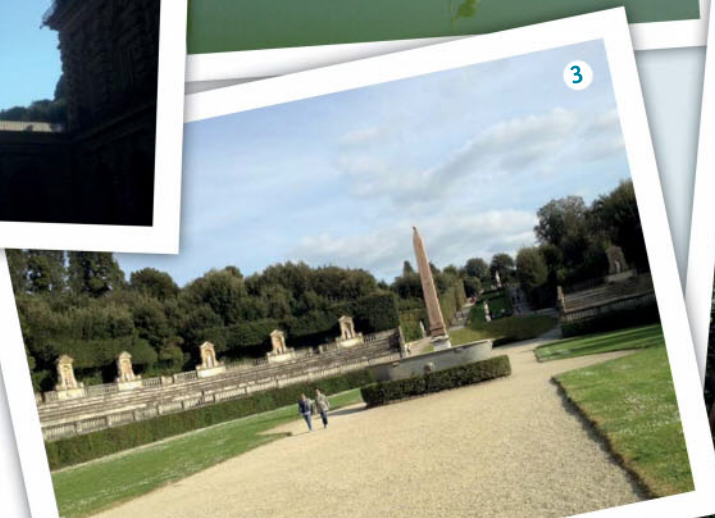
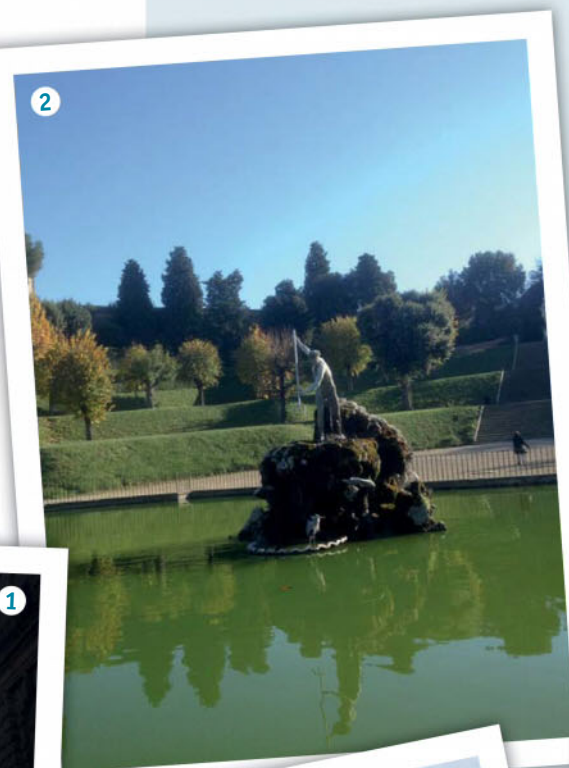
I imagine the courtly events and performances that took place here. Celebrations included the wedding reception of Ferdinando de' Medici to Christine of Lorraine, where the first opera was performed. Composers Peri and Rinuccini set the classical story of Daphne to music, sung by actors. Later, in 1600, they staged *Erudice* here.

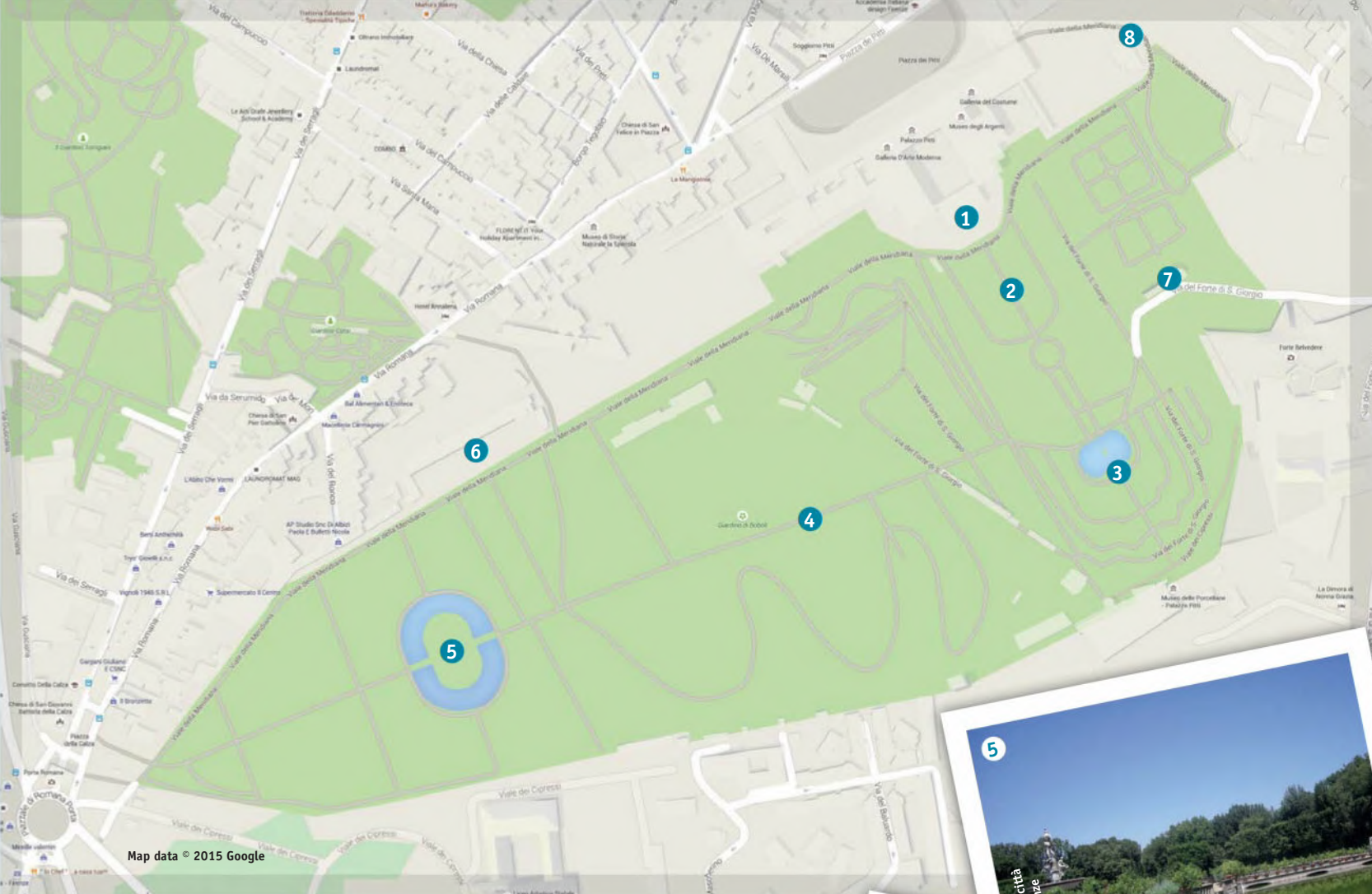
3 FORCONE BASIN VASCA DEL FORCONE

The first garden axis leads to the Forcone Basin, the bronze and marble Neptune fountain statue by Lorenzi (1565-68), and to the marble statue of Plenty, *Abbondanza*. Poised above, on the 1527 fortifications is the more intimate Knight's Garden, *Giardino del Cavaliere*. In Cosimo III's time, medicinal plants were grown here; these were replaced by exotics, now roses and peonies. The Porcelain Museum has replaced a former casino and there are views towards Florence and the countryside. Below the high medieval walls are olive groves and vineyards.

4 THE CYPRESS AVENUE IL VIOTTOLONE

The second garden axis includes *Il Viottolone*, the Long Avenue, which leads to the Ocean Fountain. To the left and right, rows of espalier citrus can be seen in the Lavacapo and Sughera Gardens. The supporting wall radiates heat and provides partial shelter from cool air currents. The





Medici's interest in growing citrus varieties is demonstrated in late 15th century paintings of their gardens.

5 ISLAND POND *VASCA DELL'ISOLA*

In the centre of the Island Pond is Giambologna's Ocean Fountain (1576). Ocean is surrounded by figures representing the Nile, Ganges and Euphrates rivers. The entrance gates' columns feature marble Capricorns, a symbol of Cosimo I de' Medici. Seventeenth century statues from the Florentine school can be seen nearby. In summer, lemons, citrons, grapefruits and bitter orange plants in pots are placed around the Ocean fountain and the lemon house.

6 LEMON HOUSE *LIMONAIA*

7 AND COFFEE HOUSE *KAFFEHAUS*

When the Grand Duchy of Tuscany passed to the Habsburg-Lorraine family, the Medici's fascination with citrus continued. Peter Leopold commissioned a lemon house. At over 100 metres in length it became

the winter home for potted citrus plants that decorated the gardens during the summer. The pretty rococo Kaffeehaus to the east of the garden provides refreshments for visitors and has been recently restored. Both designs are attributed to Zanobi del Rosso.

8 BUONTALENTI'S GROTTA *GROTTA DEL BUONTALENTI* *OR GROTTA GRANDE*

My final stop is the Grand Grotto, built in the 1580s to Buontalenti's design. It replaced a nursery by Vasari, who also designed the corridor that leads from the Uffizi across the Ponte Vecchio. Vasari's nursery façade was later decorated by Battista del Tadda, and Bandinelli's statues of Apollo and Ceres (1552-56) flank the entrance. Sculptural scenes in a sponge-like material by Pietro Mati, inspired by ancient myths, and Bernardino Poccetti's paintings of nature and wildlife decorate the interior (1580s-90s).



Photograph © *Unidismo città metropolitana di Firenze*





*My mind wanders back to Eleanora,
the Medici's love of citrus and
views of silver-green olive groves*

Above:
Espaliered citrus.
**Inset, from
top:** The Grand
Grotto; drinking
fountain; Uomo
che vanga 'Man
gardening' by
Valerio and
Giovan Simone
Cioli

THE PONTE VECCHIO

Turning to leave, I see orange espalier citrus covering the adjacent wall. As the sun descends in the sky, I head back to my hotel via the Ponte Santa Trinita. More statues greet me on the bridge. This is a perfect place to view the Ponte Vecchio in the glow of the afternoon light.

Noticing another glow, this time of fluorescent orange in a glass, I stop at Rivalta on Lungarno Corso for an aperitivo. The café is buzzing with the energy that announces the start of the weekend. Groups congregate outside, looking over the Arno in the sunshine.

I order a 'spritz', bitter Aperol with prosecco and soda, decorated with a slice of orange and a green olive. Sipping slowly, my mind wanders back to Eleanora, the Medici's love of citrus and views of silver-green olive groves and vines below the Boboli Gardens. Then I return to the medieval tower of my hotel to watch the sun set from the roof terrace. **1**



GETTING THERE

➤ BY PLANE

You can fly direct to Florence but it tends to be expensive. Most people approach from Pisa, which has a major airport with links to all parts of the Britain Isles. The 1-hour bus ride through Tuscany afterwards is hardly unpleasant.

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TURMOIL IN THE 1920S

1920 was a hugely important year in Italian history. A country on the brink of a **working class revolution**, it saw uprisings both rural and urban, the most famous of which was the workers' occupation of the Fiat factory in Turin...



Following the end of the First World War Italy was on its knees. With wheat production in 1920 less than two-thirds of what it had been before the war, people were starving, and factory workers across the country were feeling oppressed and demeaned by their wealthy bosses. The lira had collapsed, fuel was hard to come by and – not surprisingly – a Marxist movement had formed with a people's 'army' (pictured here) slowly coming

together. Then, in October 1920, the workers at the Fiat plant in Turin rose up and occupied the factory, with further factories across the country experiencing the same fate. Over 500,000 men and women took hold of their factories and refused to work. A Communist revolution was in the offing. Ultimately it did not come to pass. The Marxist movement lost momentum and its leadership crumbled. Just two years later Mussolini seized power and Italy became a Fascist state. ■



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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



ROBERT HOFSTEEDE is a registered and licensed real estate agent in Le Marche, and Managing Director of Marche Property Net. His partner, Monique de Veer, has been running the holiday rental

agency Le Marche Explorer for over 15 years.
www.marchepropertynet.com
www.le-marche-explorer.com



KEVIN GIBNEY has lived and worked in Italy for over a decade and is Managing Director at his Italian estate agency with top-to-bottom experience in finding, buying, selling and restoring properties.

His clients value his reality-based approach to property in Le Marche and beyond. ☎ +39 347 538 6668 www.propertyforsalemarche.com



LAURA PROTTI is dual qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor. She has extensive experience in Italian property law, international private law, contract law, succession law, and

taxation, and has assisted with the drafting and updating of books and articles on Italian Law. www.leplaw.co.uk



MAXIMILLIAN SMITH is Marketing Manager at De'Longhi UK and has a wealth of knowledge about coffee. De'Longhi make some of the best coffee machines on the market today – to see

the full range of options for home coffee machines see their website at
www.seriousaboutcoffee.com

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Our experts are here to help with all your questions about Italy. Email your questions to italia@anthem-publishing.com, or write to us at our usual address, as given on page 18.

HOLIDAY HOME

Q *With the pound so good against the euro at the moment, my wife and I are looking to buy a holiday home in Italy. We want to buy a property needing little work, offering a little bit of everything – near the sea, an authentic village feel, but not too far from airports or larger towns. We'd also like nice views and enough space to have friends and family visit. Our friend, a fellow Italophile, suggested Le Marche, which offers just about everything Italy has to offer but we do not know much about the region. Please could you start us on our journey?*
Daniel Thurlstone, London

A The Marche tourist board is promoting Le Marche as “Italy in One Region”. Usually these slogans are a bit empty but, as your friend mentioned, in Le Marche you will find all the good things Italy can offer: good food, friendly people, rich history and culture, mysterious mountains and a deep blue sea. You will hear people speak of the perfect combination of “*mare e monti*” (sea and mountains). The fact that property prices are moderate is a bonus. But where to start?

Do you prefer the mountains, with skiing in the winter, or do you like splashing around the Adriatic Sea and enjoying a good fish meal near the beach? You can have it all: Le Marche is long and narrow. The distance from the mountains to the sea is only 40km, so being more inland doesn't mean you can't enjoy the beach life and, conversely, from the coast you can easily reach the mountains. Le Marche truly is “*mare e monti*”. Getting around the region is easy with the Autostrada (A14), Superstrade and well-maintained provincial roads. This guarantees that most of the time you are rarely more than 1.5 hours from an airport.

I would recommend starting by selecting two or three attractive rental accommodations in the north, centre and south. Maybe try one close to the beach and another towards the mountains. Look at our rental website www.le-marche-explorer.com for suggestions. Stay there a few days or a week and contact our professional and fully licenced estate agents at

Marche Property Net (www.marchepropertynet.com) to spend a day exploring. I always recommend spending one full day with an estate agent and then exploring the area on your own for the next few days to get to know the surroundings. Remember, you are not only buying a house but also the Italian lifestyle.

Robert Hofsteede, Marche Property Net

HOUSE ON THE BEACH

Q *I'd like to buy a property in Le Marche that's as close to a beach as possible. I want to be no more than 90 minute's drive from an airport, and it has to have at least three bedrooms to accommodate myself, my wife and two teenage children. If it's walking distance to decent seafood restaurants then all the better. Where would you recommend? And how much would such a property be likely to cost me?*

John Edwards, Bath

A First off, the reader has headed to the right region. Le Marche is second in all of Italy for beaches awarded the coveted *Bandiera Blu*, awarded to beaches that are environmentally conscious and well equipped with services. The answer to the question can take many forms. If the owner wishes to live in a beach community that's active year-round, Senigallia, Civitanova Marche and San Benedetto del Tronto are superb cities, full of activity – culinary, cultural and commercial – and are lively all year-round. For terrific beach towns that are alive in-season and turn more mellow in the off-season, Porto Recanati, Numana, Sirolo and countless other towns offer that sort of experience. As for what it will cost for three bedrooms within walking distance to seafood restaurants, the reader needs to be prepared to spend upwards of €250k-€300k for a townhouse or apartment and significantly more for a house with garden space and privacy. Properties within 10 to 12 kilometres of the beach tend to carry a significant price premium as the market has lots of competition. A more cost effective strategy would be to buy 12 plus kilometres from the beach and be prepared for a 15-20 minute drive.

Kevin Gibney, Property For Sale Marche

ENGLISH AND ITALIAN WILLS

Q My husband and I have owned an apartment on a condominium in Tuscany for almost six years. It has never formed part of our English wills and we do not have Italian wills. We understand that new laws will be in place from 17 August 2015 which will allow us to include our Italian property in our English wills if we so wish. We are unsure of the benefit of this as opposed to having separate English and Italian wills, and actually whether we need an Italian will at all, and would be grateful for some clarification. Many thanks for your help.

Vicky Francis, Surrey

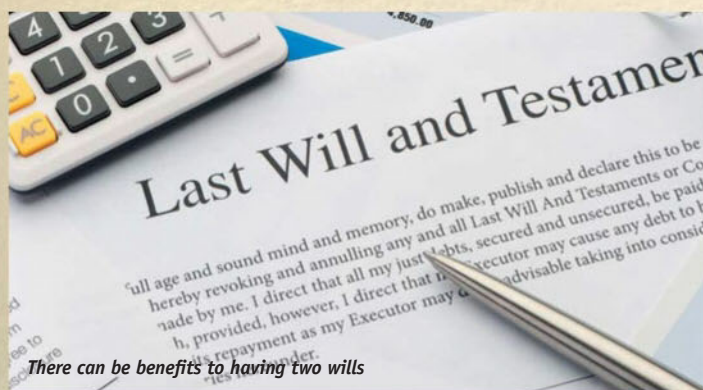
A Upon an individual's death, European Regulation no. 650/2012 comes into force. This law concerns what happens to a person's property, including their house or real estate as well as their belongings and possessions, after their passing. Applied throughout the European Union, except in states that have chosen to opt out, it is enforced at the national level. The Regulation encompasses all civil-law aspects of estate succession, and is enforced in participating states regardless of whether or not the deceased had prepared a last will and testament.

At the time of death, the law that takes precedence is that of the deceased's habitual residence, unless the deceased was more closely associated with another state. Alternatively, in cases where habitual residence and nationality differ, the individual may have specified in their will for the law of their state of nationality to apply.

People with property in Italy therefore have the option to elect in their wills that the law of their nationality should apply to the succession of their relevant Italian property. Making this specification is a way of avoiding local forced heirship regulations, which would otherwise come into effect. The UK opted out of EU Regulation no. 650/2012. However, the regulation's provisions may have implications for anyone who owns assets in a EU state that has opted in, like Italy.

Individuals may choose to dispose of their assets in Italy in their UK will. However, making a separate Italian will that exclusively concerns one's Italian assets can have practical benefits. Anyone who owns properties in multiple EU states and could be affected by inconsistencies in the enforcement of European Regulation no. 650/2012 across those states should consult a professional before making a will or revisiting their existing will.

Laura Protti, LEP Law



There can be benefits to having two wills

Laura Protti is the founder of LEP Law. She is dual-qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor, and specialises in assisting British and Italian clients with matters relating to Italian law. Visit her website at www.leplaw.co.uk for more.



Coffee Corner

RUNNING COSTS

Q In each and every issue of Italia! I read about coffee machines from your associate De'Longhi. I've always been tempted to invest in a machine to make 'real' coffee (I'm embarrassed to admit I've always just put up with the convenience of the instant, granulated stuff). But what are the 'running costs' of owning a machine such as a Eletta Top? Do they need regular descaling? And how about water softening? I live in a hard water area.

Michelle Stark, Wiltshire

A It is not possible to say what the exact running costs will be as it depends on usage: the cost of the coffee and milk, the number of coffees you make, how long the machine is left turned on for, the energy tariff you are on, and so forth. However, broadly speaking we suggest that it costs about 10p for an espresso and 15p for a milk drink such as a cappuccino. Compare this to what you would spend every time at a coffee shop and the machine pays for itself in no time at all!

What's more, with a bean-to-cup coffee machine, you can enjoy coffee shop quality from fresh beans and fresh milk, and all at the touch of a button.

It is important to descale a coffee machine (of any type) regularly. You don't need to use a water softener but it does mean less descaling if you do. The Eletta Cappuccino Top can be fitted with a water filter and reminds you when to descale the machine based on your water hardness and the amount of water used by the machine. An automatic programme does the descaling for you too. A double pack of De'Longhi Natural Descaler has a RRP of £7.99 and would last 3 to 6 months. We recommend using De'Longhi Natural Descaler as we can't always be sure what chemicals other manufacturers use, which could damage the machine.

If you want to discover more on costs, download the free De'Longhi Coffee Expert app for Apple and Android mobile phones and try our Coffee Calculator.

Maximillian Smith, Trade Marketing Manager De'Longhi
www.seriousaboutcoffee.com

The Eletta can be fitted with a water filter





NOW THAT WE CAN ALL TAKE SELFIES in front of the Colosseum with our smart phones, have we travellers lost our enthusiasm for souvenirs? I remember mantels filled with Toby Jugs, German beer steins, Russian nesting dolls, little leaning figurines of the Tower of Pisa, and much more. I love postcards, too. Some people, I know, still bring home these tangible bits of faraway places, and I salute them: hail, fellow collectors.

I used to wonder what it would be like to have unlimited resources, and ship home all those wonderful, expensive, bulky things that break the bank and won't fit in your luggage anyway. I used to wonder, but no more – I found the answer in Florence, just north of the historic centre, on a hill called Montughi.

There's a mansion on the hill, surrounded by an extensive, green and pleasant park, complete with ponds, follies, statues, and all the attributes of a proper Victorian English estate. The house was the childhood home of Frederick Stibbert, whose Italian mother was married to an Englishman. It was his grandfather, though, Giles Stibbert, who gave Frederick the wherewithal to begin his career as a collector. Giles had been Commander-

The Collector

Frederick Stibbert really admired accoutrements of past wars: swords, helmets, muskets. . . One room contains fourteen full size replica horses

in-Chief of the British East India Company, and had become very, very wealthy indeed. Multi-billionaire wealthy, in modern terms; and when he died, he left it all to Frederick.

Frederick was born in 1836. Educated in England, he loved travel, art, and antiquities – the more exotic, the better. He wasn't an idle dilettante, though. He fought for his mother's country in the Italian Wars of Independence and was awarded a medal for valour in the Battle of Trentino. Afterwards, he began his travels and his career acquiring, well... souvenirs.

The results of his efforts fill to bursting the 57 rooms of the house on Montughi, despite several enlargements and additions. There, in rooms lined with leather, a visitor will marvel at fine furniture of the 15th to 19th centuries, paintings, exquisite porcelain and majolica ware, and mannequins wearing costumes from Europe, India, China and Japan. He even managed to secure the coat, trousers, and socks Napoleon wore for his 1805 coronation as King of Italy.

But what Frederick really admired was armour, and other accoutrements of past wars: swords, helmets, muskets, battleaxes. One room in the house contains fourteen full size replica horses and riders, fully armed and equipped. It's a strange procession: European knights, Japanese samurai, and Islamic horsemen, all on parade together. There is even a case containing the black armour worn by Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, the last of the great Italian *condottieri*. Giovanni was the father of Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, and great-great-grandfather of a Queen of England, Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I.

The house, of course, inevitably became a museum. Frederick left it to the city in his will. The Stibbert Museum contains about 50,000 fascinating items. I'd like to show you some pictures, but photography is forbidden inside, even with a smart phone. I can't even show you a postcard – after my visit, I decided to give up collecting. ■



The Stibbert Museum



ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.

DINING WITH THE DUCHESS

James Miller was delighted to be invited to meet Nicoletta and Gioacchino, the Duchess and Duke of Palma, at their home in Palermo, the Palazzo Lanza Tomasi...



Nicoletta possesses a matriarchal manner that is laden with charisma and charm. When she engages you, you can't help but to feel privileged to be the subject of her undivided attention



Photography © James Miller

There was a glorious time during the late 19th century when Sicily was at the heart of Europe's *belle époque* period. It was a time when Palermo, the island's capital, was a crucible of artistic beauty and extravagance. Amongst the other European cities of the day, Palermo's incandescent cultural light drew people from all over the world to bask in grandeur that was uniquely Sicilian. During this time the island's patrons were powerful aristocratic families. This was a fascinating era, when there was a potent mix of political change, the noble but restrained sensibilities of the day competing with the passionate inferno inherent in the cultural identity of southern Italians. And all this played out under the scorching Sicilian sun.

Palermo has a certain timeworn charm, although the remnants of its noble past are everywhere and the potency of Sicily's former rulers remains prominent across the city's visual heritage today. Magnificent family crests and aristocratic regalia still adorn the *palazzi* of the historical centre. Stubbornly Sicilian, they refuse obscurity and are unperturbed by the ravages of time and the changing fortunes of the island's history.

There is an Italian literary work that captures this period of Sicily's history in all its glory: *Il Gattopardo*, "The Leopard", written by one of the island's noble sons, Giuseppe Tomasi, the Prince of Lampedusa. The book was made into a film with Burt Lancaster playing the lead character, Don Fabrizio Corbera; the self-assured and powerful Prince of Salina. The opulent film sets and intensely passionate story secured its status as a cinema classic. This work of fiction, inspired by real-life characters, offers the reader a chance to press up against a gilded window and peer into an enchanting bygone age – something I'd done many times with my own much loved and worn copy. However this year I was fortunate enough for the window to be flung open and to step straight into the ballroom when I was invited to spend a few days at the Palazzo Lanza Tomasi in the company of Nicoletta and Gioacchino, the Duchess and Duke of Palma and residents and owners of the Palazzo.

SPLENDID WORLD

My adventure into the splendid world of Sicilian aristocracy began when I arrived at the heavy oak door of the Palazzo. The door was decorated with a powerful looking brass lion's head. I heard a clatter behind the panelled wood and I was then received with a warm welcome from one of the Duchess's aides. She guided me through the shade of the Palazzo's inner courtyard and showed me to my apartment. The interior was authentically Sicilian, the spacious apartment had none of the disposable pretensions of modern hotel fashions. It was the epitome of simple Sicilian elegance. Antique furniture, classical paintings in gilded frames, original tiled floors and an ambience of regal calm tucked away from the hectic city streets. Although I hadn't met the Duke and Duchess yet I could see they had done everything possible to make me feel at home, and the apartment had a relaxing yet refined feel to it, perfect for a well-rested night.

THE PERFECT HOSTESS

The next morning I met with a group of budding gastronomes in the Palazzo courtyard. A mixture of Italians, Americans and Canadians, all eager to embark upon a culinary adventure with the Duchess. Then like a whirlwind the Duchess Nicoletta arrived. The perfect hostess, she gave all her guests a warm welcome and her enthusiasm and positive mood had energised the group in no time. Nicoletta possesses a matriarchal manner that is laden with charisma and charm. When she engages you, you can't help but feel privileged to be the subject of her undivided attention. She has a classic, confident Italian style. Simple, sophisticated and elegant. Tastefully dressed in red and black, the look finished with an understated flourish of stylish jewellery. She flung open the courtyard doors into the light of the street and led the group to one of Palermo's famous historic markets, Il Capo.

Il Capo is renowned for offering the intrepid gastronomic adventurer a gloriously raucous experience in Sicilian market culture. The carefully arranged stalls combust with colour and all manner of fruit, veg and fish. The proportions strain belief! The Market traders are a lively bunch of characters and Nicoletta is something of a preferred patron. Her affable and respectful nature inspires mutual loyalty amongst the traders. "We belong to each other," Nicoletta exclaimed, smiling. One of the traders offered Nicoletta some bread that she duly shared with the group. "This bread is from Monreale, a nearby town. It is the most famous bread in Palermo," she explained. It's clear that in Sicily food and passion are synonymous and that they bring people of varying social standing together. Nicoletta carefully selected the ingredients for our cookery session, the traders dutifully showing her the choice items. She pointed out the beautiful grand Church of the Immaculate Conception behind one of the market stalls. It struck me that if this were Britain, a 17th century Baroque showpiece would be turning heads and drawing tourist attention, but Palermo is full of these treasures and you sometimes stumble upon them when you least expect it.

WARM EFFICIENCY

We returned to the Palazzo and strolled around the bucolic terrace facing the seafront. Nicoletta was deftly flitting from one pot of herbs to another, closely inspecting each selection before popping them into her basket. The fragrant sea air mixed with the herbs was intoxicating. With warm efficiency Nicoletta spirited us all into the kitchen. Now that we were back in the Palazzo, the palatial surroundings were firing my imagination and conjuring images from *Il Gattopardo*'s ballroom scene. Burt Lancaster's Fabrizio, the Prince of Salina, dancing with Claudia Cardinale to the music of the Verdi. However I was soon back in the moment: we had our own masterpiece to create, and for this performance Nicoletta was the maestro and we her budding orchestra. There was a building air of excitement as we prepared for our cooking masterclass with the Duchess. I stared at the well-used

Clockwise from top left: The Duchess holding court over dinner; picking herbs from her garden; the Palazzo Lanza Tomasi's magnificent sea-facing terrace; choosing ingredients in Il Capo market

copper pots hanging from the traditional blue tiles and felt a definite sense of history within those walls. I could only imagine the meals that had been expertly prepared, using local Sicilian produce, and served to some of Europe's great and good through the years.

Nicoletta revealed numerous tips and tricks, such as the insertion of a vanilla pod into a container of sugar and how that naturally infuses the flavours. She went to considerable lengths to explain the technical aspects of the different culinary techniques. She also expressed her personal sentiments about cooking: "Food is love, it is a multi-sensory experience and you must look and touch." The session had a brief interlude wherein we all had a glass of wine, (or two) and some delicious *panelle* – which we felt suitably proud of as we had prepared and cooked them ourselves! I couldn't agree more with Nicoletta's sentiments about cooking being a sensory indulgence as the sights and aromas in the kitchen were heavenly.

A SUMPTUOUS AFFAIR

Right on cue we were ushered into the grand dining room to experience the fruits of our labour. This was a truly sumptuous affair. The room was sublime, itself a visual feast: the long table bedecked in crystal and silverware, Murano glass chandeliers resplendently hanging from the ceiling and views out to the impossibly blue Tyrrhenian Sea. This was a dining experience like no other. In between bites of delicious swordfish and Pantelleria-style potato salad, the Duke was regaling me with stories of his time as the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in New York and when he was directing the major opera theatres in Italy. All three courses were delicious. The fresh local produce and carefully combined ingredients made for a meal that was nothing short of exquisite. The biggest surprise was the *gelo di mandarino*, tangerine jelly. I can honestly say that I've never tasted anything quite like that before, a truly exotic indulgence of the senses. The Palazzo staff expertly served the food with precision timing. Nicoletta and Gioacchino are an excellent team, adept at creating an ambience of warm hospitality and traditional refinement that makes you feel at ease and yet privileged to be a guest in their home.

After the meal Nicoletta gave us a tour of the Palazzo's lavish rooms. We settled in a grand, stately sitting room that had amazing vistas to the sea. We were all keen to learn more about the Palazzo and how it is inextricably linked to their family history. Nicoletta explained that the Palazzo was built in the second half of the 17th century, and was originally constructed upon a former Spanish military fortification designed to repel attacks from invading Turkish forces. Nicoletta brought the historical narrative to life with verve and gusto. She explained how the Palazzo had been subjected to a number of different structural incarnations and was exchanged through the hands of some of Sicily's most

powerful families. Finally it was bought in 1948 by Giuseppe Tomasi, the Prince of Lampedusa, author of *Il Gattopardo* and Gioacchino's adoptive father. The family history was fascinating and full of intrigue. Nicoletta pointed out a piece of art that depicted ancestors, some of which had mysterious and mystical lives. There were tales of saints, stigmata and even communication with the Devil! Nicoletta also took the time to show her guests the original manuscript of *Il Gattopardo* and other numerous antique treasures and paintings, each with its own fascination and appeal.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Shortly after the tour, the Duchess's guests departed, thoroughly satisfied with their experience. Over the course of the following evening I was fortunate enough to be able to spend more time with Gioacchino. He explained what it was like to be the heir of the Prince of Lampedusa, and what his own life was like as a Duke. It was fascinating to learn about one of the most prominent characters of *Il Gattopardo*, Tancredi, the nephew of the novel's patriarch, the powerful Prince Fabrizio. Tancredi is depicted as a strong-minded charismatic young man, and the inspiration for this character was actually Gioacchino himself. It wasn't difficult to imagine this prospect, the more I spoke to Gioacchino the more apparent it was that this is a man of principle and defined values. His numerous accomplishments in the arts are a testament to his passions and commitment.

I spent much of the next morning with Nicoletta. Despite her hectic schedule we chatted for hours in the family sitting room. She expressed how she views herself as a typical working woman rather than a lofty Duchess, her responsibilities to the Palazzo and guests are the focus of much of her time. Nicoletta recounted many fascinating tales from her youth, and how she has travelled to different countries, experiencing life to the full. Interestingly, one of Nicoletta's favourite countries is Scotland, where she lived for a time. Listening to Nicoletta's life story was captivating, as were her views on life, love, family and her many passions. She explained how she is still spellbound by natural beauty and maintains a fascination for the world and different cultures. Her effervescent and generous spirit was a pleasure to be around, although sadly my stay with the Duchess and Duke was coming to a close.

I'd had a truly memorable experience and Nicoletta and Gioacchino had been terrific hosts. They are dedicated to ensuring their guests have an enjoyable time. After staying at Palazzo Lanza Tomasi and gaining a magical insight into the lives of the Sicilian aristocracy, I can state with the certainty and regal confidence of Don Fabrizio Corbera that my stay at the Palazzo was fit for a prince. ■

See the Duchess's website at www.butera28.it
Special thanks also to Barbara Iaccarino

Clockwise from top right: The Duchess teaching the finer points of la cucina; the Duke entertaining his guests with a smile; the house's library collection includes the original manuscript of *Il Gattopardo*; the Palazzo dining room, resplendent with antiques, silverware and amazing sea views; Sicilian food at its finest; the Palazzo staff serving with precision and grace



There was a building air of excitement amongst the group as we prepared for our cooking masterclass with the Duchess, followed by a sumptuous dining experience like no other





It is easy to get smitten by a place like Portofino, but there are many more beautiful – and less expensive – parts of Italy too

Buying a Home in Italy

PART 2

You've decided on the area and property-type you want, now what do you do? **Fleur Kinson** discusses viewing trips, finding your ideal home, the buying process and currency transfers...

You've done your soul-searching. You've thought long and hard about which part of Italy most appeals to you and where you might best be able to afford to buy. You've solved the town vs. country dilemma and the whether-or-not-to-restore quandary. Crucially, you have absolutely pinpointed your budget and know exactly how much you can spend on a home in Italy. What are the next steps to take?

You'll already have started trawling through estate agents' online listings of properties for sale. Now you should talk to some of those agents. Make email contact at first, but then get on the phone. Start a dialogue, discuss your situation and describe exactly what you're looking for. Remember that most agents have properties that

they haven't yet found time to add to their websites. A recent arrival on their books might be perfect for you. But in any case, agents have a wealth of experience and understanding, and they can give you invaluable all-round advice.

Now comes the time when you need to plan a viewing trip or 'inspection trip' to Italy. You'll be viewing some properties you've already seen on websites plus similar homes that the agents you've contacted think might appeal to you. You'll be exploring your chosen area in more detail and getting a much better feel for how things are down on the ground.

Don't be tempted to regard a viewing trip as a mini-holiday in the sun with a bit of househunting thrown in! Stay focussed and try to get the most out of your visit. But also stay open-minded. Many



Photography © iStock

GOING ON A VIEWING TRIP

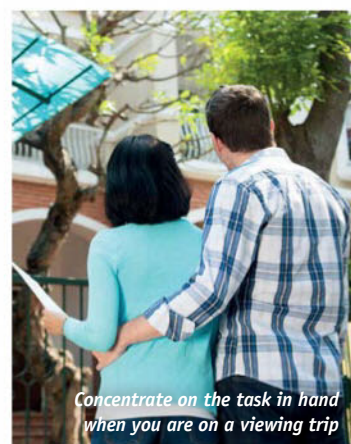
During your viewing trip, don't hesitate to bombard your agent with a billion questions. They'll be showing you lots of properties in your price range, and whenever you see one that interests you, be sure to enquire after things such as: How far is it from the airport? What are the local transport links like? Where are the nearest shops and amenities? What furniture is included in the price? Are the kitchen and bathroom fittings included? (Note that in Italy people often take their kitchen fittings with them when they move.) Crucially, what is the *total* price of the property including all taxes? And if it's an apartment, what are the annual fees for maintenance of the building and upkeep of communal areas?

Choosing the right home for you involves a fair bit of gut-feeling, it's true, but you must strive to balance your heart with your head. Always weigh up charm with practicality. That tiny townhouse at the top of the steep, cobbled alley is adorable, but where is the nearest parking space? That country house way out in the wilderness is deeply romantic, but where are you going to do your shopping? Try not to make a snap decision; instead coolly assess all the

benefits and drawbacks of any home that seems to have stolen your heart.

And however good your agent is, don't let them sway you completely. Remember that when they show you around an area, they'll be showing you all the very loveliest places. Try to see the least desirable bits too. Find out what the area is like in the depths of winter. And don't just listen to your estate agent; try to speak to ex-pats and local people too if you can. Spend a day away from your agent, doing your own exploration. Visit other estate agents based in the area (look for '*agenzie immobiliare*'). And don't rule out private sales (keep an eye out for houses with '*VENDESI*' – for sale – notices). Remember that a private sale means no agents' fees to pay!

Sometimes you'll find the home you want on your very first viewing trip to Italy; sometimes not. When you get back home, analyse all the pros and cons of each property you've seen, and if none of them are what you want, contact your agent again and discuss what other options you might have. Remember that your agent has known countless property-hunters like you, and knows exactly what you're going through.



Concentrate on the task in hand when you are on a viewing trip

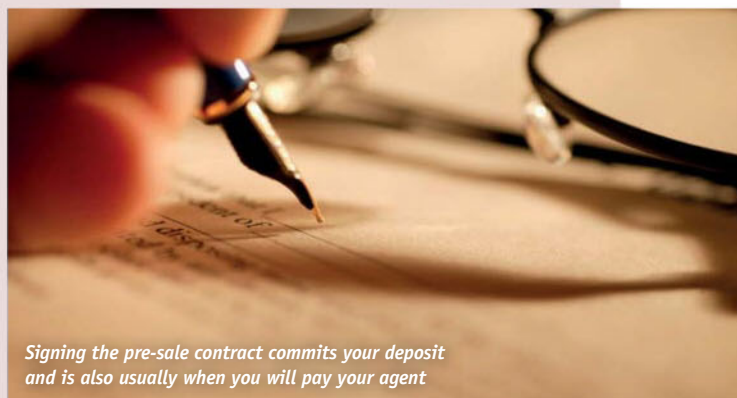
YOU'VE FOUND IT!

But let's say you've finally found The One. You're smitten, it's just what you want, and you definitely want to buy it. What happens now? First, you should clarify again precisely everything that's included in the price. What furniture, fittings, etc. If there is land, where are the boundaries, and does anyone have rights of access? If restoration work is required, get a good estimate for it and factor this into whatever offer you choose to make.

Before making a formal offer, you might consider hiring a professional valuer, a '*consulente immobiliare*', to assess the property's worth, though this is unusual for property sales in Italy. However, you'll almost certainly want to hire a legal representative, a '*notaio*', to make the sale go as smoothly as possible. Buyers and sellers often use the same *notaio* in Italy, which rather speeds things up – especially as it means that there are no delays in communication.

Once you've agreed to buy (woo-hoo! congratulations!), you sign the pre-sale contract – the '*contratto preliminare*' or '*compromesso*' – and pay a deposit. This is legally binding, and if you pull out of the sale now you'll lose that deposit. However, if the seller pulls out, you'll get your deposit back plus usually also some financial compensation from the seller. Signing the *compromesso* is normally also the time when you pay your agent's fees.

It's worth noting all the little services that your agent's fees may cover. Apart from showing you around properties and the area itself, agents frequently assist with things like negotiating on price, advising you on mortgages, translating documents, finding you builders if you need them, chasing any necessary planning permissions, opening an Italian bank account for you, contacting utility companies to get bills to the property sent to your name, and dealing with myriad other niggling bureaucratic and practical concerns. Your agent is often an invaluable ally throughout your whole adventure of buying in Italy.



Signing the pre-sale contract commits your deposit and is also usually when you will pay your agent

MOVING THE MONEY

Now that we've reached the point where you're actually beginning to hand over sums of money for a home in Italy, it's worth having a quick word about foreign exchange (FX) currency brokers. Banks make a considerable profit when you use them to transfer large amounts from one country to another, and you can save quite a bit of cash by using an FX currency specialist instead. They charge low or no fees and offer very competitive exchange rates. Most banks charge about 4 per cent more than a specialist international money transfer provider and they also charge a transfer fee (perhaps £15-£40) for each transfer you make.

First ask your bank what they would charge to move the kind of sum you're looking to pay. This will give you a guideline to start with. Then check the rates on a range of FX companies online, to see what a better deal you can get. You might want to start with a comparison website such as fxcompared.com to see how different FX companies stand up. This impartial

site rates money transfer providers not just by how good a deal they can give you, but by other important factors such as reliability, standard of service, client feedback and how long the company has been in business.

Understandably, you might feel a little nervous about entrusting your cash to one of the many FX brokers currently operating online, and indeed you ought to check any firm out carefully before you commit. Note that companies 'authorised' by the Financial Conduct Authority have better safeguards in place than companies merely 'registered' by the FCA. You're more likely to get all your money back from an authorised company than a registered one in the highly unlikely event that such a company suddenly fails. But it is true that currency exchange companies are not covered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) in the way that banks are. If something goes wrong, you're not *guaranteed* full compensation.



Consider the exchange rate

Currency	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	S\$	HK\$
USA	39.4	27.7	0.300	24.2	1.0	1.0
EURO						
ENGLAND						
JAPAN						
SINGAPORE						
HONG KONG						



A working vineyard in Chianti may be your ideal home, but those don't come onto the market too often these days



people travel out with a very specific property-type in mind, but then they see something different when they're out there, they fall in love with it and realise that it's what they really want after all.

Note that estate agents will sometimes assist with the costs of a three-to-five-day viewing trip, as well as helping you to organise it and showing you round properties and the area itself when you arrive. Usually this takes the form of refunding your flights and accommodation costs once you've decided to buy a property from them. But not every agent does this, so do be sure to enquire about this well in advance.

Lots and lots to think about there! But it's not over yet. Next month, in the final part of this series, we will look more deeply into the details of the property purchase itself, and start to think about what happens when you actually move into your house in Italy. ■

INFORMATION

► For more information on Italy's regions and their property markets, see the *Italia!* magazine website at www.italytravelandlife.com

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4 takes on PEACHES

The peach has been cultivated in Italy since Roman times and is an essential ingredient in many **seasonal summer desserts**. Here we present three such *dolci* – and one classic Italian cocktail...





Bellini cocktail

Cocktail Bellini

SERVES 4
► Preparation
 10 minutes
► Cooking
 none

4 large fresh peaches
1 bottle of chilled prosecco

Peel the peaches, then cut them in half and remove the stones. Dice the halves into small cubes. Purée in a food processor until you have a smooth liquid. Line a sieve with a moist cheesecloth and gently push the purée through with a spoon to remove any larger pieces.

Pour 20ml of the peach purée into the bottom of four tall champagne flutes or long glasses. Top up the glasses with prosecco to serve.

TIP: The Bellini cocktail was originally made with a splash of raspberry or cherry juice, to give it an unusual pink glow. If you would like to recreate this version, add a couple of drops of raspberry juice to the glass just before you serve. For a non-alcoholic version of the cocktail, substitute the prosecco for soda water.



Glazed peaches in red wine

Pesche glassate al vino rosso

SERVES 2
► Preparation
 10 minutes
► Cooking
 35 minutes

3 small peaches
2 tbsp caster sugar
60g fresh blueberries, washed
125ml red wine
1 tbsp unsalted butter
40g pine nuts
1 tsp honey
½ a cinnamon stick
fresh mint leaves, to garnish

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6.

Wash and halve the peaches, remove the stones and sprinkle the cut surfaces with sugar. Place in a small baking dish, cut side facing upwards, then scatter with half of the blueberries and pour the red wine over the top. Bake for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat the butter in a small frying pan and lightly toast the pine nuts for 2 minutes. Set aside.

Remove the peaches from the baking tray and transfer the cooking juices to a small frying pan. Add the honey and cinnamon stick, and boil for around 5 minutes, until the liquid has reduced.

Pour the sauce through a sieve. Divide the peach halves between two deep plates, pour the sauce over the top and serve garnished with the remaining blueberries, the mint and the toasted pine nuts.



Peaches and cream profiteroles

Bigné alla panna e pesca

SERVES 2
 ► **Preparation**
 5 minutes
 ► **Cooking**
 35 minutes

FOR THE PASTRY

250ml water

½ tsp salt

100g unsalted butter

150g plain flour, mixed with 1 tbsp cornflour

4 free-range eggs, beaten

FOR THE FILLING

1 peach, washed, peeled

60ml double cream, whipped with 1 tsp vanilla sugar
 icing sugar, to dust

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4.

Boil 250ml water in a large saucepan along with the salt. Add the butter and let it melt while the water gently simmers.

Tip the flour into the water in one go, and stir constantly until it forms a smooth ball. Beat the pastry mixture over the heat for a further 2 minutes.

Transfer the pastry to a mixing bowl and gradually fold in the eggs, one at a time.

Grease a baking sheet and lightly dust with flour. Spoon the pastry mixture into a piping bag, and pipe two buns about the size of a tennis ball onto the sheet. Bake in the oven for 20-25 minutes.

Take the buns out of the oven and split in half sideways. Cut the peach in half, remove the stone, then cut into slices.

Fill the cooled profiteroles with peach slices and whipped cream. Place the lid on top of each, dust with icing sugar and serve fresh.



Stuffed peaches

Pesche ripiene

SERVES 2
 ► **Preparation**
 10 minutes
 ► **Cooking**
 20-30 minutes

2 fresh peaches

6 amaretti biscuits

2 tbsp chopped almonds

125ml Vin Santo

2 tbsp caster sugar

Preheat the oven to 170°C/Gas Mark 3.

Cut each peach in half and remove the stone. Using a teaspoon, scoop out a little of the peach flesh to slightly enlarge the depression that contained the stone.

Finely crumble the amaretti biscuits, then place in a small bowl and mix with the chopped almonds and 1 tbsp Vin Santo. Stuff each peach half with a couple of spoonfuls of the mixture.

Carefully stand the stuffed peach halves side by side in a greased ovenproof dish, sprinkle with sugar, and drizzle the remaining Vin Santo evenly over the top.

Bake in the oven for 20-30 minutes until the peaches are soft but not browned. Serve immediately with whipped cream or ice cream.

TIP: For a variation on this peach dessert, substitute the almonds for chopped dark chocolate and the Vin Santo for Marsala.

Classic Recipes

Fish, chicken and pork recur frequently in the Italian *cucina*. Here we have a **classic take** on each, with a great apple cake to finish...



Oven-baked sea bream with Florentine herb stuffing

Pagello al forno con ripieno fiorentino alle erbe

► **SERVES** 4 ► **PREPARATION** 10 minutes ► **COOKING** 25 minutes

There are a number of fish that go under the general name of 'sea bream', and any will serve, but the typical fish in this dish is the 'common pandora' (*pagellus erythrinus*), sometimes also known in Italy as the 'lutrino'...

4 sea bream, cleaned and descaled

5 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

FOR THE STUFFING

4 fresh sage leaves

4 sprigs fresh thyme

4 sprigs fresh parsley

4 garlic cloves, skins left on but crushed

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 fresh red chillies, seeds removed and roughly chopped (optional)

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4.

Brush a baking sheet with olive oil. Hold one of the fish open with one hand, and with the other hand put one quarter of the stuffing ingredients into the cavity. Repeat with the remaining fish and stuffing ingredients.

Place the fish on the greased baking sheet and drizzle over the oil. Bake for 20-25 minutes, depending on the size of the fish, until cooked through.

Alternatively, the fish can be cooked *in cartoccio* – in individual foil or greaseproof paper parcels. This steams rather than bakes them and concentrates the flavours more.

Place each fish on a piece of foil or greaseproof paper large enough to wrap it in and bring the two shorter edges together. Fold them together with a little pleat pointing down towards the fish. Then fold each long edge in the same way. This forms a sealed parcel so the juices will not escape. Place the parcels in a roasting tin and bake as before. The fish can be served in the foil or paper.



Mustard-roast chicken with caramelized onions

Pollo arrosto con senape e cipolle caramellate

► **SERVES** 4-6 ► **PREPARATION** 20 minutes ► **COOKING** 1 hour 10 minutes

Don't worry about using too much mustard in this dish – it will be absorbed by the chicken during the cooking process and the sweetness of the onions will balance the flavours.

*1kg onions, peeled, finely sliced
4 garlic cloves, halved and lightly crushed
170g jar of mild mustard
a 1.5kg free-range chicken
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
a few tbsp olive oil
125ml white wine
5 tbsp chicken stock*

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4.

Place the sliced onions and garlic in an ovenproof dish, large enough to accommodate the chicken.

Spread the mustard over the skin of the chicken to coat thoroughly. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and place on top of the onions.

Drizzle the olive oil over the chicken, put it in the oven and cook for about 35 minutes, until the skin has become slightly crispy.

Turn the chicken over, pour the white wine over the chicken and the onions, and cook for a further 25 minutes.

Turn the bird once more and cook for a further 10 minutes to ensure that the skin is golden and crispy. Add the stock when necessary to stop the onions drying out.

To check if the meat is cooked, pierce a chicken leg with a skewer – when the juices run clear it is ready. Remove from the oven. Spoon some of the caramelized onions onto a warm plate and top with a portion of chicken.



Gnocchi with sausage and porcini sauce

Gnocchi con salsa di salsiccia e porcini

► **SERVES 8** ► **PREPARATION 1 hour** ► **COOKING 10 minutes**

To freeze uncooked gnocchi, spread them out on a well-floured tray, making sure they don't touch each other, and put them in the freezer. When frozen, shake off any excess flour and transfer to a freezer bag. Use within 3 months.

1kg potatoes (King Edwards work well), unpeeled

1 free-range egg, beaten

300g Italian '00' flour

1 tsp of salt

FOR THE SAUCE

5 tbsp olive oil

1 red onion, peeled, finely chopped

500g lean pork sausages, skinned and crumbled

3 garlic cloves, left whole and crushed

half a fresh chilli, seeded and thinly sliced

3-4 tbsp dry white wine

50g dried porcini, covered in warm water and soaked for 20 minutes

freshly ground black pepper

150ml double cream

Bring a large pan of water to the boil and cook the potatoes until tender, then drain. Peel them while they are still warm, using cold water to protect your hands, and pass the peeled flesh through a *passatutto* (food mill), or a potato masher. Place in a bowl.

Stir in the egg and flour to form a soft, pliable dough. Divide into pieces the size of a small fist and roll out to lengths about 2cm thick. Cut the lengths into 2cm-long pieces. You can now, if you like, make the characteristic mark of the gnocchi by pressing a fork lightly onto each one. Leave the gnocchi to stand for 15 minutes while you make the sauce.

Heat 3 tbsp olive oil in a pan and fry the onion gently until golden. Add the crumbled sausage meat, garlic, chilli and wine, and cook for a few minutes until the meat is evenly browned.

Meanwhile, drain and roughly chop the porcini. (Reserve the mushroom water for a soup or stock, if you like). Heat the remaining oil in a frying pan and fry the porcini with a little pepper.

Meanwhile, bring a large pan of salted water to the boil and add the gnocchi. When they are cooked they will bob up to the surface – this will take about 2 minutes. Take them out as soon as they are ready and set aside on a warm plate to steam dry.

When the sausage mixture is cooked, add the porcini and cream and stir until the sauce is heated through. Add the gnocchi to coat them in the sauce and serve.



Apple cake

Torta di mele

► **SERVES** 6 ► **PREPARATION** 20 minutes ► **COOKING** 50 minutes

Pears will work equally well as an alternative in this recipe. Use the same quantity and prepare in the same way as you would the apples.

7 *tbsp* unsalted butter, 1 *tbsp* kept aside
150g granulated sugar
3 free-range eggs, lightly beaten
160ml milk
300g plain flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ *tsp* grated organic lemon zest
1 sachet of yeast
2 apples, peeled, cored and sliced
25g pine nuts
25g raisins

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4.

Grease a 20cm loose-based tin with 1 *tbsp* unsalted butter.

In a large bowl, cream the remaining 6 *tbsp* butter with the sugar. Blend in the eggs and milk. Stir in the flour, lemon zest and yeast and mix together well.

Place a thin layer of batter in the tin. Top with a single layer of apple slices. Sprinkle half the pine nuts and half the raisins over the apple slices.

Repeat and top with the remaining batter. Place the remaining apple slices in a decorative, circular pattern on top.

Bake for 50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the cake's centre comes out clean. Leave the cake to cool in the tin before serving.

Pronto!

Some of the more complex Italian recipes will take hours to prepare – and just as long to enjoy! – but when you're in a hurry you're going to need quick-and-easy meals to prepare for your family.

Italia! presents five of our favourite risottos...



Basil, tomato and Parmesan risotto

Risotto al pomodoro, basilico e parmigiano reggiano

In the EU, only cheese from certain regions can be called 'Parmigiano-Reggiano' or 'Parmesan'; elsewhere, 'Parmesan' can be used to describe a type of cheese. Either way, Grana Padano will work as a substitute.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 20 minutes

500ml chicken or vegetable stock
1 tbsp olive oil
3 shallots, peeled, finely sliced
150g risotto rice
100ml dry white wine
100g Parmesan or Grana Padano
30g unsalted butter
10 fresh basil leaves, roughly chopped
100g cherry tomatoes, halved
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
ricotta (optional)

Heat the stock in a saucepan. In a separate saucepan, heat the olive oil, then add the shallots and sweat for 3 minutes. Add the rice, and toast it, but don't let it take on a colour – keep moving it around the pan. After about 2 minutes add the wine and let it sizzle away while you continuously stir.

Start adding the stock one ladleful at a time, stirring continuously. Cook for around 15 minutes, then check to see whether the rice is cooked. You want it to still have a bit of a bite. Add more stock if it isn't quite ready, and continue stirring.

Remove from the heat, add the Parmesan and the butter, and stir gently. Add the tomatoes and the basil to the rice and check the seasoning. Serve with a dollop of ricotta on top, if desired.



Pea, mint and mascarpone risotto

Risotto ai piselli, menta e mascarpone

The combination of pea and mint is one of the great tastes of summer, and it works very well with this creamy cheese.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 20 minutes

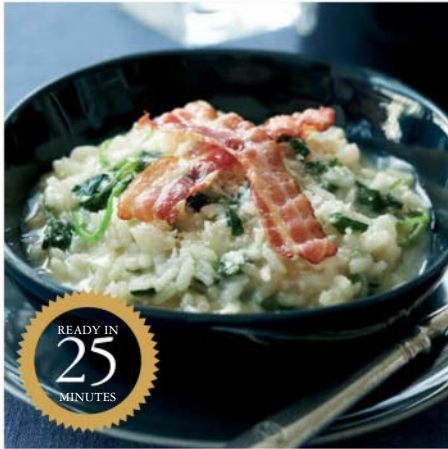
150g peas, fresh or frozen
10 fresh mint leaves
500ml chicken or vegetable stock
1 tbsp olive oil
3 shallots, peeled, finely chopped
150g risotto rice
100ml dry white wine
30g unsalted butter
2 tbsp mascarpone

Boil the peas for 1 minute, (3 from frozen), then set aside. Take two thirds of the cooked peas and put them in a blender with the mint, then blitz. Keep the whole peas to one side.

Start to make the risotto as described in the recipe for basil, tomato and Parmesan risotto (left). This time however, after 10 minutes' cooking time, add the minty pea purée and the remaining whole peas.

After a further 5 minutes, check whether the rice is cooked. Add more stock if it isn't quite ready, and continue stirring.

Remove from the heat, add the butter and mascarpone, and stir gently. Divide between two plates and serve with a herby salad.



Watercress risotto with crispy pancetta

Risotto al crescione con pancetta

The pepperiness of the watercress and the saltiness of the pancetta create this beautifully balanced risotto with bite.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 20 minutes

500ml chicken or vegetable stock

1 tbsp olive oil

3 shallots, peeled, finely chopped

150g risotto rice

100ml dry white wine

a large handful of watercress, washed, roughly torn

4 slices of pancetta

30g unsalted butter

50g Parmesan or Grana Padano

Start to make the risotto as described in the recipe for basil, tomato and Parmesan risotto (far left).

When you get to the stage where you are ready to add the warm stock, preheat the grill. Pop the pancetta slices on a baking tray and cook under the grill for 2 minutes, or until crispy.

After 12 minutes' cooking time add the watercress to the risotto. After 15 minutes, check to see whether the rice is cooked. Add more stock if you need to.

Remove the risotto from the heat, add the Parmesan and the butter and stir gently. Divide the risotto between two plates, then stand the crispy pancetta on the top.



Butternut squash risotto with goats' cheese

Risotto alla zucca violina con formaggio di capra

Before you know it, autumn will start to make an appearance – so now is a great time to plan for squash.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 15 minutes
- **COOKING** 20 minutes

300g butternut squash, peeled, diced into 1cm cubes

3 tbsp olive oil

500ml chicken or vegetable stock

3 shallots, peeled, finely chopped

150g risotto rice

100ml dry white wine

30g unsalted butter

100g firm goats' cheese, broken up into small pieces

6 fresh sage leaves

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Drizzle the butternut squash cubes with 1 tbsp of olive oil, season well, and sauté for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, start to make the risotto as described in the recipe for basil, tomato and Parmesan risotto (far left).

Towards the end of the cooking time, heat 1 tbsp of olive oil in a frying pan, drop in the sage leaves, and fry until crispy. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on kitchen towel.

Remove the risotto from the heat, add half of the goats' cheese and stir gently. Add the cubes of roasted butternut to the pan, then divide between the plates, and crumble the remaining cheese over the top. Sprinkle with the crispy sage leaves to serve.



Risotto rice pudding with stewed plums

Risotto dolce con susine stufate

Risotto can work as a dessert too. Here is a fantastic recipe using seasonal fruit.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 15 minutes

350ml milk

25g caster sugar

90g arborio or carnaroli rice

1 vanilla pod

75ml double cream

250g plums

1-2 tbsp water

3 amaretti biscuits

In a heavy saucepan heat the milk, then add 20g sugar and the risotto rice. Add the seeds of one vanilla pod to the saucepan, then toss the pod in too. Simmer gently, stirring continuously so the rice doesn't burn on the bottom of the pan, until the rice is cooked. This should take around 16-18 minutes. About 10 minutes in, add the cream and remove the vanilla pod from the pan.

In the meantime, wash the plums, cut in half and remove the stone. Place the plums in a separate saucepan and add 1 tbsp of water and 1 tsp sugar (check the sweetness of the plum as the amount of sugar needed will differ between varieties). Set on a low heat and simmer very gently for 5-10 minutes, depending on the size of the plums.

Put the amaretti in a freezer bag and crush with a rolling pin. Divide the rice between two bowls and top with the cooked plums. Scatter the crumbled amaretti over the top of the plums to serve.

DRIED PASTA

When it comes to pasta, fresh is best, yes? Well, not necessarily so. If you make the effort to find really **high-quality dried pasta** then you're in for a treat. Paul Pettengale samples a selection of his favourites.

Every kitchen store cupboard in Italy will contain a selection of dried pasta. It's as much of a staple as tinned tomatoes, jarred *passata* or bags of dried *porcini* mushrooms. Unfortunately, when it comes to buying dried pasta, a lot of what is commonly available is bland and unworthy of the pot, and this is especially so of the supermarket-branded pastas you'll find on the shelves in the UK, the US and beyond. However, take the time and effort to source really high-quality dried pasta and you'll be rewarded with an Italian classic worthy of any dish. Although the higher-end dried pastas will inevitably cost a lot more than the run-of-the-mill stuff, the difference in taste, texture and ability to work with your carefully crafted sauces is immense. Here we've selected seven of our favourite dried pastas. Most come from specialist importers, though one is from our local Italian deli and two from a supermarket, albeit the quality brands available in Waitrose.



1



2



CIPRIANI PAPPARDELLE

From *Something Italian* www.something-italian.com

Price **£6.45** for 250g

The Cipriani name is synonymous with Harry's Bar in Venice, opened in 1931 by Giuseppe Cipriani using money granted to him by Bostonian Harry Pickering. The family has been serving quality food (and, of course, drinks) ever since, and now has its own food brand. These *pappardelle* are, quite simply, amazing. They only need a few minutes to cook (well, four, but ensure you don't overdo it), and have a lovely silky texture as well as a firm, though not at all nutty, bite. They hold a sauce perfectly, thanks to a slight 'roughness', and work really well with tomato-based ragu. We tried them with the Cipriani Bizantina sauce (see *Top Picks*, page 12). Delicious.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Quite simply the best dried pasta around, with the famous Harry's Bar Cipriani name behind it. Silky smooth, yet holds a sauce really well.

1 RUMMO LENTA LAVORAZIONE FARFALLE NO 85

From Waitrose

www.waitrose.com

Price **£1.50** for 500g

Good value for money, especially given the weight of the bag, this is more of a 'standard' pasta you'd have with an everyday tomato or meat ragu. Nicely firm to the bite, but a little bland to taste.

VERDICT ★★★

The kind of pasta you'd serve up for a family evening meal, but not one to use if you're entertaining guests. Though it is great value.

2 GAROFALO FUSILLONE

From Ocado

www.ocado.com

Price **£2.39** for 500g

These *fusillone* are really big swirls of pasta (the kids loved it for that alone). They taste slightly nutty, but in a good way and, given the surface area for each, they hold a sauce perfectly. Firm to the bite, but be sure not to overcook them.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Different, in so far as these pasta swirls are so huge, but great for rich and light sauces alike. Don't overcook or they'll break up!



3



5



4



6

3 ORI DI NAPOLI PENNE A TRIANGOLO

From Various Italian deli's
Typical price £3.95 for 500g
Our local deli' sells this delightful pasta, unusual in that the *penna* is triangular rather than round in shape. It cooks well, though you have to guess the timing as there are no instructions on the packet! Firm, tasty and interesting. A dinner party talking point!

VERDICT ★★★★★

Unusual in their triangular shape, these penne from Naples are some of the best we tried. They work especially well with cheese sauces.

4 CARLUCCIO'S PENNE REGINE

From Carluccio's
www.carluccios.com
Price £3.75 for 500g
These *penne*, large in size, were a disappointment. Follow the cooking instructions on the packet and they are too hard, cook them for a minute more and they fall to pieces. They are also pretty bland and lacking in any real character.

VERDICT ★★

The cooking instructions didn't hold true and the pasta fell to pieces when served. We prefer Carluccio's traditional *trofie* pasta.

5 TENUTA MARMORELLE SPAGHETTI WITH ROCKET AND CHILLI

From Puglia Shop Online
www.pugliashoponline.com
Price £4.20 for 500g
The only 'flavoured' pasta we tried and the combination of rocket and chilli works well. Tastes great, in fact, though you'll have to pick your partner sauce very carefully.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Great taste and texture, though works best with simple meat-based ragus where the sauce won't overpower the pasta.

6 GIUSEPPE COCCO CONCHIGLIONI PASTA

From Waitrose
www.waitrose.com
Price £2.39 for 250g
Not cheap for a pasta from a supermarket, but this is worth the money. It cooks perfectly if you follow the packet instructions and has plenty of flavour and a really good texture for holding the sauce of your choice. Good in a pasta bake.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Pricy, but both tasty and has the perfect texture for holding a sauce. We tried it with traditional beef and pork mince ragu and loved it.

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WHITE WINES OF

Italy is best known for its red wines – those harking from Tuscany, Piedmont and Veneto especially – but the whites are on the rise! **Paul Pettengale** looks to Friuli for inspiration...

Yes, you've read the intro line above and immediately thought, 'but what about pinot grigio?'. True, PG has become a favourite of the UK and the US, but there is so, so much more in the way of white wine to enjoy from Italy. And much of the best of it – in our opinion – comes from the region of

Modern techniques are combined with age-old sensibilities to craft wines rich in character

Friuli (or Friuli-Venezia Giulia to give it its full name). This oft-ignored, mountainous land right at the northeast of Italy has the perfect growing conditions for a wide range of grape varieties used in the making of white wine. Yes, it produces some stunningly good pinot grigio, though (over the page) we've decided to select just one for inclusion in this issue's taste test. Such is the terrain, the soil types and the climate, Friuli lends itself to grape varieties both well-known (chardonnay, sauvignon blanc), and those that few outside the region have ever heard of (ribolla gialla and verduzzo, for instance). Modern wine-making techniques are combined with age-old (very much Old World) sensibilities to craft wines that are rich in character yet also of interest and intrigue...





PINOT GRIGIO 2013, JERMANN

From Majestic

www.majestic.co.uk

Price £23.00 (see text)

We wanted to include grape varieties other than pinot grigio in this month's selection of wines from Friuli, but it would be a disgrace to not include this one – an absolutely top-end wine that elevates the PG experience to a new level. It has a degree of richness – a creaminess almost – that is utterly unlike the 'standard' pinot grigios you'll find in the supermarket or your local wine bar. Strong citrus aromas give way to a wine full of body in the mouth with a roasted almond finish. Buy two for £18 each.

COLLIO FRIULANO 2013, MARCO FELLUGA

From Berkmann Wine Cellars

www.berkmann.co.uk

Price £22.00

'Collio' is a wine-making technique introduced in the 1960s that uses low temperatures during fermentation to ensure the preservation of the grapes' freshness of taste. Marco Felluga is one of the leading proponents of this method and his friulano (a grape variety native to the region, grown 250 metres above sea level) is a wonderful expression of what can be achieved. Soft and delicate with bright, lively fruit and a floral, medium body.

VINNAE RIBOLLA GIALLA IGT 2013, JERMANN

From Great Western Wine

www.greatwesternwine.co.uk

Price £21.50

Jermann is one of the leading names in wine-making in the Friuli region and this exceptional wine from Great Western is an interesting blend of ribolla gialla and friulano, with a touch of riesling. It has a sweetness on the nose – oranges and white peach – though much like viognier it's dryer in the mouth than you would anticipate. Full bodied, though it retains the freshness of the fruit as no oak is used in its creation. One to savour.

'SHARIS' RIBOLLA GIALLA & CHARDONNAY 2014, LIVIO FELLUGA

From Liberty Wines

www.libertywines.co.uk

Price £19.99

Livio Felluga's vineyards are located across the coveted Collio and Colli Orientali sub-zones within Friuli – which is as good a place as any to start in the region when it comes to growing grapes. Low yields and high quality go on to produce great wines, such as this blend of the local ribolla gialla grape variety with chardonnay (grown pretty well everywhere). The result? Opulence in a glass! Rich, though medium-bodied, it's both floral and fruity.



GREAT WITH...

Grilled fish such as halibut or turbot, creamy pasta dishes and BBQed chicken.



GREAT WITH...

Fresh sea food such as shelled prawns, oysters and cracked crab.



GREAT WITH...

The sweetness of grilled lobster would work brilliantly with this wine.



GREAT WITH...

Lemon sole, baked sea bream, steamed sea bass... You guessed it – fish!

DISCOVERY OF THE
MONTH
**AUG
2015**

SAUVIGNON BLANC 2014, PONTE DEL DIAVOLO

From Liberty Wines

www.libertywines.co.uk

Price £9.99

The Ponte Del Diavolo brand is a collaboration between wine-makers Andrea Morlin, Alana McGettigan and Matt Thomson. This wine shows just how versatile the Friuli region is in terms of the grape varieties that flourish here. 100 per cent pure sauvignon blanc is used to make a wonderfully fresh and vibrant wine. It doesn't have an over-powering taste of gooseberries (as is typical of the variety), but it's subtly there with an accompanying fresh cut grass taste.

RIBOLLA GIALLA 2011, SIRCH

From Berry Bros. & Rudd

www.bbr.com

Price £14.95

Made using nothing but the local ribolla gialla grape variety, this wine from Sirch is a gem. Indeed, you could call it a peach as it's the aromas of that summer fruit that hit you first when you take a whiff – peaches, together with honeysuckle blossom and lemon peel. It's another soft, smooth wine, though it has enough acidity to keep it crisp and fresh in the mouth. Finely balanced, it has a length and character quite unlike wines that use ribolla gialla in a blend. A great all-round white.

COLLIO 'JUST MOLAMATTA' 2013, MARCO FELLUGA

From Berkmann Wine Cellars

www.berkmann.co.uk

Price £14.75

Another one of Marco Felluga's wines to utilise the Collio method of cold-production, this is a lovely blend of pinot bianco (40 per cent), friulano (40 per cent) and ribolla gialla (the rest). It's surprisingly dry on the nose, with aromas of apples and pears, and it's remarkably fresh in the mouth (thanks to that cold fermentation). It's a well-balanced wine however, with a pleasing mineral finish. It's not particularly typical of the region, but well worth a try.

THE REDS AREN'T DEAD!

Although Friuli is renowned for its white wines, there are some producers making fine red wines. This one, the Schioppettino 2013 by Marco Sara (available from Berry Bros. & Rudd for £17.95 a bottle) is a shining example. The schioppettino is a grape variety indigenous to Friuli and it is used to create young, fresh reds similar in many ways to the light style of Rhone wines (or, indeed the wines produced around the French town of Saumur). Lots of cherry and raspberry fruit on the nose, it's light-to-medium bodied in the mouth and worth seeking out. More reds from Friuli, please!



GREAT WITH...

A seafood platter piled with oysters, crab, lobster, mussels and crevettes.



GREAT WITH...

Grilled chicken, char-grilled pork chops, seafood salads or, of course, fish.



GREAT WITH...

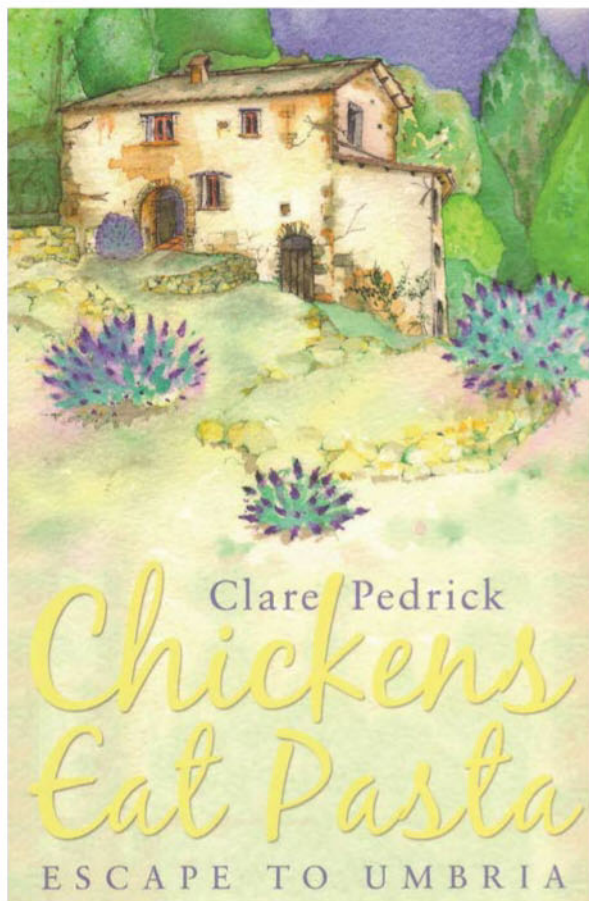
Pan-fried sea bass fillets with crispy skin, or a prawn and pea risotto.



A grape variety indigenous to Friuli

IN PRINT

This month, the tale of how a woman fell in love with a man after falling in love with a house, an examination of the works of one of **Italy's most prolific poets** and a new book on just what makes Calabria so special...



◀ CHICKENS EAT PASTA

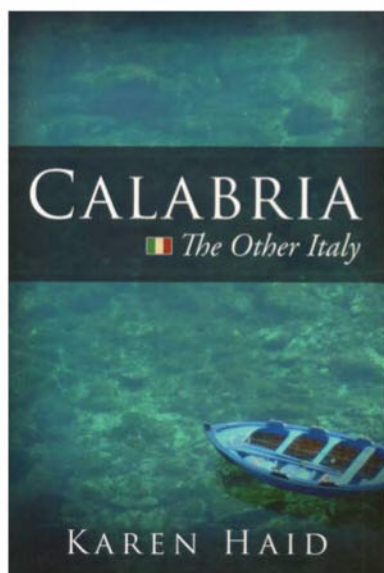
Clare Pedrick, Matador, £9.99 (paperback)

She was just 26 when Clare Pedrick decided to up sticks and buy a ruined house in Umbria – a brave move for one so young. Now, still living in Italy with her husband Mario, who she met in the same village as the tumbledown cottage she purchased, and their three children, she is quite sanguine about how she and her partner came to be together: “I am always being asked how I ended up living in Italy and what brought me here in the first place”, she says. “Most people assume it must have been a man. But actually it was a love affair with a house – which led to a love affair with a man.” As a British journalist who went on to become the Rome correspondent for the *Washington Post*, Clare certainly has a way with words and *Chickens Eat Pasta*, her tale of the transition from life in England as a Cambridge University graduate to one in Umbria restoring a house on a hill, is an entertaining and heart-warming read. Exploring cultural differences, the nuances of life in a strange country and the charming characters that dwell there, she paints a detailed picture of what it is to fall in love with a country and the man who became her husband.

▼ A VOICE IN THE FIRE

Theodore Ell, Troubador Publishing, £15.95 (paperback)

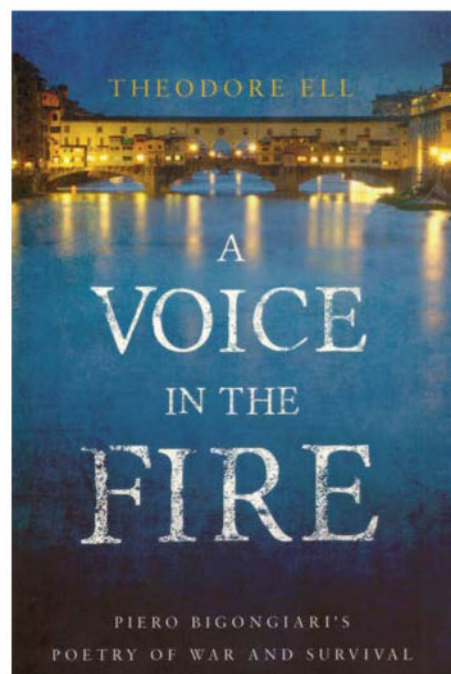
Subtitled ‘Piero Bigliongirari’s Poetry of War and Survival’, *A Voice in the Fire* is the first English language exploration of the life and work of an Italian poet described as ‘among the most prolific and consistent Italian poets of the last century’. A member of the third generation of the *ermetismo*, his poetry has been noted for being an exploration of ‘the mysterious, the hidden and the abstract’. Born in 1914 and living to the age of 83 he saw vast change in his country, with the Second World War framing much of his work. This book is somewhat academic in style but is nonetheless a complete and illuminating examination of the life and work of the man and his extraordinary take on life in Italy through decades of turmoil.



◀ CALABRIA: THE OTHER ITALY

Karen Haid, Mill City Press, \$14.95 (paperback), available in the UK via Amazon.co.uk

The author freely admits that the region of Calabria is: “largely ignored, struggling for survival”, and “little known even to Italians [except for] the nefarious activities of the ‘Ndrangheta mafia’”. Her book aims to explode that myth, illustrating the southwestern tip of Italy as a region with a wealth of culture, a strong sense of local identity rich in heritage, superb (often spicy!) food and distinctive wines. She examines Calabrian history, its arts and crafts and just what makes this region well worth a new look.



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PLUS Seven must-do things around Lake Garda, lakeside properties to buy, quality Italian olive oils and Amarone wines tasted, meeting the artists of Le Marche, how to become a gondolier, and much, much more!

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ITALIA! ICONS

An Italian icon, for sure, but Alessi's Juicy Salif citrus juicer was actually designed by Philippe Starck, a Frenchman, utilising a restaurant napkin as his initial drawing board.

#01

THE ALESSI JUICY SALIF CITRUS JUICER

The tale of how a simple concept became one of the most iconic kitchen implements in the world...

Every kitchen needs a citrus juicer; whether for squeezing oranges for your early morning vitamin C hit or for extracting the juice of limes to make the perfect margarita. But no simple juicer is as iconic as the instantly recognisable Juicy Salif from Italian design house Alessi. First brought to market in 1990, this space-age looking implement is available in two sizes; the larger one (photographed) that stands just under 30cm tall, or the 'mini' version that's more suited to juicing lemons and limes.

Alessi, the company formed by Giovanni Alessi in 1921 utilising a workshop near Lake Orta in the Italian Alps, commissioned French designer Philippe Starck to create the piece which is constructed of aluminium with tiny rubber pads on its 'feet' so it won't slip as you press your fruit. Such is its iconic status it was selected for inclusion as a piece on display in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And its design influence? Not the Tripods from HG Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, but squid, the initial doodlings being drawn onto a napkin as Starck squeezed lemon over a plate of calamari. ■

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"Really good pasta" ★★★★★

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